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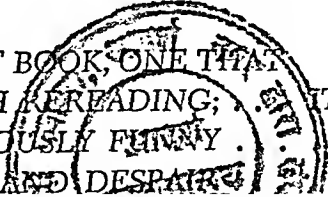
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by GÜNTER GRASS

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h o o k o m e

The Wide Skirt

GRANTED: I AM an inmate of a mental hospital; my keeper is watching me, he never lets me out of his sight; there's a peephole in the door, and my keeper's eye is the shade of brown that can never see through a blue-eyed type like me.

So you see, my keeper can't be an enemy. I've come to be very fond of him; when he stops looking at me from behind the door and comes into the room, I tell him incidents from my life, so he can get to know me in spite of the peephole between us. He seems to treasure my stories, because every time I tell him some fairy tale, he shows his gratitude by bringing out his latest knot construction. I wouldn't swear that he's an artist. But I am certain that an exhibition of his creations would be well received by the press and attract a few purchasers. He picks up common pieces of string in the patients' rooms after visiting hours, disentangles them, and works them up into elaborate contorted spooks; then he dips them in plaster, lets them harden, and mounts them on knitting needles that he fastens to little wooden pedestals.

He often plays with the idea of coloring his works. I advise him against it, taking my white enamel bed as an example and bidding him try to imagine how this most perfect of all beds would look if painted in many colors. He raises his hands in horror, tries to give his rather expressionless face an expression of extreme disgust, and abandons his polychrome projects.

So you see, my white-enameled, metal hospital bed has become a norm and standard. To me it is still more: my bed is a goal attained at last, it is my consolation and might

become my faith if the management allowed me to make a few changes: I should like, for instance, to have the bars built up higher, to prevent anyone from coming too close to me.

Once a week a visiting day breaks in on the stillness that I plait between the white metal bars. This is the time for the people who want to save me, whom it amuses to love me, who try to esteem and respect themselves, to get to know themselves, through me. How blind, how nervous and ill-bred they are! They scratch the white enamel of my bedstead with their fingernail scissors, they scribble obscene little men on it with their ballpoint pens and blue pencils. No sooner has my lawyer blasted the room with his hello than he slaps his nylon hat down over the lower left-hand bedpost—an act of violence that shatters my peace of mind for the duration of his visit, and lawyers find a good deal to talk about.

After my visitors have deposited their gifts beneath the water color of the anemones, on the little white table covered with oilcloth, after they have submitted their current projects for my salvation, and convinced me, whom they are working indefatigably to save, of the high quality of their charity, they recover their relish in their own existence, and leave me. Then my keeper comes in to air the room and collect the strings from the gift packages. Often after airing he finds time to sit by my bed for a while, disentangling his strings, and spreading silence until I call the silence Bruno and Bruno silence.

Bruno Münsterberg—this time I mean my keeper, I've stopped playing with words—has bought me five hundred sheets of writing paper.

Should this supply prove insufficient, Bruno, who is unmarried and childless and hails from the Sauerland, will go to the little stationery store that also sells toys, and get me some more of the unlined space I need for the recording of my memories—I only hope they are accurate. I could never have asked such a service of my visitors, the lawyer, for instance, or Klepp. The solicitous affection prescribed in my case would surely have deterred my friends from bringing me anything so dangerous as blank paper and making it available to this mind of mine which persists in excreting syllables.

"Oh, Bruno," I said, "would you buy me a ream of virgin paper?" And Bruno, looking up at the ceiling and pointing

his index finger in the same direction by way of inviting a comparison, replied: "You mean white paper, Herr Oskar?"

I stuck to "virgin" and asked Bruno to say just that in the store. When he came back late in the afternoon with the package, he gave the impression of a Bruno shaken by thought. Several times he looked fixedly up at the ceiling from which he derived all his inspiration. And a little later he spoke: "That was the right word you told me. I asked for virgin paper and the salesgirl blushed like mad before getting it."

Fearing an interminable conversation about salesgirls in stationery stores, I regretted having spoken of virgin paper and said nothing, waiting for Bruno to leave the room. Only then did I open the package with the five hundred sheets of writing paper.

For a time I weighed the hard, flexible ream in my hands; then I counted out ten sheets and stowed the rest in my bedside table. I found my fountain pen in the drawer beside the photograph album: it's full, ink is no problem, how shall I begin?

You can begin a story in the middle and create confusion by striking out boldly, backward and forward. You can be modern, put aside all mention of time and distance and, when the whole thing is done, proclaim, or let someone else proclaim, that you have finally, at the last moment, solved the space-time problem. Or you can declare at the very start that it's impossible to write a novel nowadays, but then, behind your own back so to speak, give birth to a whopper, a novel to end all novels. I have also been told that it makes a good impression, an impression of modesty so to speak, if you begin by saying that a novel can't have a hero any more because there are no more individualists, because individuality is a thing of the past, because man—each man and all men together—is alone in his loneliness and no one is entitled to individual loneliness, and all men lumped together make up a "lonely mass" without names and without heroes. All this may be true. But as far as I and Bruno my keeper are concerned, I beg leave to say that we are both heroes, very different heroes, he on his side of the peephole, and I on my side; and even when he opens the door, the two of us, with all our friendship and loneliness, are still far from being a nameless, heroless mass.

I shall begin far away from me; for no one ought to tell the story of his life who hasn't the patience to sav^d

or two about at least half of his grandparents before plunging into his own existence. And so to you personally, dear reader, who are no doubt leading a muddled kind of life outside this institution, to you my friends and weekly visitors who suspect nothing of my paper supply, I introduce Oskar's maternal grandmother.

Late one October afternoon my grandmother Anna Bronski was sitting in her skirts at the edge of a potato field. In the morning you might have seen how expert my grandmother was at making the limp potato plants into neat piles; at noon she had eaten a chunk of bread smeared with lard and syrup; then she had dug over the field a last time, and now she sat in her skirts between two nearly full baskets. The soles of her boots rose up at right angles to the ground, converging slightly at the toes, and in front of them smoldered a fire of potato plants, flaring up asthmatically from time to time, sending a queasy film of smoke out over the scarcely inclined crust of the earth. The year was 1899; she was sitting in the heart of Kashubia, not far from Bissau but still closer to the brickworks between Ramkau and Viereck, in front of her the Brenntau highway at a point between Dirschau and Karthaus, behind her the black forest of Goldkrug; there she sat, pushing potatoes about beneath the hot ashes with the charred tip of a hazel branch.

If I have made a special point of my grandmother's skirt, leaving no doubt, I hope, that she was sitting in her skirts; if indeed I have gone so far as to call the whole chapter "The Wide Skirt," it is because I know how much I owe to this article of apparel. My grandmother had on not just one skirt, but four, one over the other. It should not be supposed that she wore one skirt and three petticoats; no, she wore four skirts; one supported the next, and she wore the lot of them in accordance with a definite system, that is, the order of the skirts was changed from day to day. The one that was on top yesterday was today in second place; the second became the third. The one that was third yesterday was next to her skin today. The one that was closest to her yesterday clearly disclosed its pattern today, or rather its lack of pattern: all my grandmother Anna Bronski's skirts favored the same potato color. It must have been becoming to her.

Aside from the color, my grandmother's skirts were distinguished by a lavish expanse of material. They puffed and billowed when the wind came, crackled as it passed, and

sagged when it was gone, and all four of them flew out ahead of her when she had the wind in her stern. When she sat down, she gathered her skirts about her.

In addition to the four skirts, billowing, sagging, hanging down in folds, or standing stiff and empty beside her bed, my grandmother possessed a fifth. It differed in no way from the other four potato-colored garments. And actually the fifth skirt was not always fifth. Like its brothers—for skirts are masculine by nature—it was subject to change, it was worn like the other four, and like them when its time had come, took its turn in the wash trough every fifth Friday, then Saturday on the line by the kitchen window, and when dry on the ironing board.

When, after one of these Saturdays spent in housecleaning, baking, washing and ironing, after milking and feeding the cow, my grandmother immersed herself from top to toe in the tub, when after leaving a little of herself in the soapsuds and letting the water in the tub sink back to its normal level, she sat down on the edge of the bed swathed in a great flowery towel, the four worn skirts and the freshly washed skirt lay spread out before her on the floor. She pondered, propping the lower lid of her right eye with her right index finger, and since she consulted no one, not even her brother Vincent, she quickly made up her mind. She stood up and with her bare toes pushed aside the skirt whose potato color had lost the most bloom. The freshly laundered one took its place.

On Sunday morning she went to church in Ramkau and inaugurated the new order of skirts in honor of Jesus, about whom she had very set ideas. Where did my grandmother wear the laundered skirt? She was not only a cleanly woman, but also a rather vain one; she wore the best piece where it could be seen in the sunlight when the weather was good.

But now it was a Monday afternoon and my grandmother was sitting by the potato fire. Today her Sunday skirt was one layer closer to her person, while the one that had basked in the warmth of her skin on Sunday swathed her hips in Monday gloom. Whistling with no particular tune in mind, she coaxed the first cooked potato out of the ashes with her hazel branch and pushed it away from the smoldering mound to cool in the breeze. Then she spitted the charred and crusty tuber on a pointed stick and held it close to her mouth; she had stopped whistling and instead pursed her cracked,

appeared into the lane, when the two others, long and thin, who had probably been searching the brickyard in the meantime, climbed over the horizon and came plodding through the mud, so long and thin, but not really skinny, that my grandmother missed her potato again; because it's not every day that you see this kind of thing, three full-grown men, though they hadn't grown in exactly the same directions, hopping around telegraph poles, nearly breaking the chimney off the brickworks, and then at intervals, first short and wide, then long and thin, but all with the same difficulty, picking up more and more mud on the soles of their boots, leaping through the field that Vincent had plowed two days before, and disappearing down the sunken lane.

Then all three of them were gone and my grandmother ventured to spit another potato, which by this time was almost cold. She hastily blew the earth and ashes off the skin, popped the whole potato straight into her mouth. They must be from the brickworks, she thought if she thought anything, and she was still chewing with a circular motion when one of them jumped out of the lane, wild eyes over a black mustache, reached the fire in two jumps, stood before, behind, and beside the fire all at once, cursing, scared, not knowing which way to go, unable to turn back, for behind him Long and Thin were running down the lane. He hit his knees, the eyes in his head were like to pop out, and sweat poured from his forehead. Panting, his whole face atremble, he ventured to crawl closer, toward the soles of my grandmother's boots, peering up at her like a squat little animal. Heaving a great sigh, which made her stop chewing on her potato, my grandmother let her feet tilt over, stopped thinking about bricks and brickmakers, and lifted high her skirt, no, all four skirts, high enough so that Short and Wide, who was not from the brickworks, could crawl underneath. Gone was his black mustache; he didn't look like an animal any more, he was neither from Ramkau nor from Viereck, at any rate he had vanished with his fright, he had ceased to be wide or short but he took up room just the same, he forgot to pant or tremble and he had stopped hitting his knees; all was as still as on the first day of Creation or the last; a bit of wind hummed in the potato fire, the telegraph poles counted themselves in silence, the chimney of the brickworks stood at attention, and my grandmother smoothed down her uppermost skirt neatly and sensibly over the second one; she scarcely felt him under her fourth skirt, and her third skirt wasn't

even aware that there was anything new and unusual next to her skin. Yes, unusual it was, but the top was nicely smoothed out and the second and third layers didn't know a thing; and so she scraped two or three potatoes out of the ashes, took four raw ones from the basket beneath her right elbow, pushed the raw spuds one after another into the hot ashes, covered them over with more ashes, and poked the fire till the smoke rose in clouds—what else could she have done?

My grandmother's skirts had barely settled down; the sticky smudge of the potato fire, which had lost its direction with all the poking and thrashing about, had barely had time to adjust itself to the wind and resume its low yellow course across the field to southwestward, when Long and Thin popped out of the lane, hot in pursuit of Short and Wide, who by now had set up housekeeping beneath my grandmother's skirts; they were indeed long and thin and they wore the uniform of the rural constabulary.

They nearly ran past my grandmother. One of them even jumped over the fire. But suddenly they remembered they had heels and used them to brake with, about-faced, stood booted and uniformed in the smudge, coughed, pulled their uniforms out of the smudge, taking some of it along with them, and, still coughing, turned to my grandmother, asked her if she had seen Koljaiczek, 'cause she must have seen him 'cause she was sitting here by the lane and that was the way he had come.

My grandmother hadn't seen any Koljaiczek because she didn't know any Koljaiczek. Was he from the brickworks, she asked, 'cause the only ones she knew were the ones from the brickworks. But according to the uniforms, this Koljaiczek had nothing to do with bricks, but was short and stocky. My grandmother remembered she had seen somebody like that running and pointed her stick with the steaming potato on the end toward Bissau, which, to judge by the telegraph poles if you counted westward from the chimney. But whether this fellow that was running was a Koljaiczek, my grandmother couldn't say; she'd been having enough trouble with this fire, she explained, it was burning poorly, how could she worry her head about all the people that ran by or stood in the smoke, and anyway she never worried her head about people she didn't know, she only knew the peo-

ple in Bissau, Ramkau, Viereck, and the brickworks—and that was plenty for her.

After saying all this, my grandmother heaved a gentle sigh, but it was enough of a sigh to make the uniforms ask what there was to sigh about. She nodded toward the fire, meaning to say that she had sighed because the fire was doing poorly and maybe a little on account of the people standing in the smoke; then she bit off half her potato with her widely spaced incisors, and gave her undivided attention to the business of chewing, while her eyeballs rolled heavenward.

My grandmother's absent gaze told the uniforms nothing; unable to make up their minds whether to look for Bissau behind the telegraph poles, they poked their bayonets into all the piles of potato tops that hadn't been set on fire. Responding to a sudden inspiration, they upset the two baskets under my grandmother's elbows almost simultaneously and were quite bewildered when nothing but potatoes came rolling out, and no Koljaiczek. Full of suspicion, they crept round the stack of potatoes, as though Koljaiczek had somehow got into it, thrust in their bayonets as though deliberately taking aim, and were disappointed to hear no cry. Their suspicions were aroused by every bush, however abject, by every mousehole, by a colony of molehills, and most of all by my grandmother, who sat there as if rooted to the spot, sighing, rolling her eyes so that the whites showed, listing the Kashubian names of all the saints—all of which seemed to have been brought on by the poor performance of the fire and the overturning of her potato baskets.

The uniforms stayed on for a good half-hour. They took up positions at varying distances from the fire, they took an azimuth on the chimney, contemplated an offensive against Bissau but postponed it, and held out their purple hands over the fire until my grandmother, though without interrupting her sighs, gave each of them a charred potato. But in the midst of chewing, the uniforms remembered their uniforms, dashed a little way out into the field along the furze bordering the lane, and scared up a hare which, however, turned out not to be Koljaiczek. Returning to the fire, they recovered the mealy, steaming spuds and then, wearied and rather mellowed by their battles, decided to pick up the raw potatoes and put them back into the baskets which they had overturned in line of duty.

Only when evening began to squeeze a fine slant

Under the Raft

IT IS NOT so easy, lying here in this scrubbed hospital bed under a glass peephole with Bruno's eye in it, to give a picture of the smoke clouds that rose from Kashubian potato fires or of the slanting October rain. If I didn't have my drum, which, when handled adroitly and patiently, remembers all the incidentals that I need to get the essential down on paper, and if I didn't have the permission of the management to drum on it three or four hours a day, I'd be a poor bastard with nothing to say for my grandparents.

In any case, my drum tells me this: That afternoon in the year 1899, while in South Africa Oom Kruger was brushing his bushy anti-British eyebrows, my mother Agnes, between Dirschau and Karthaus, not far from the Bissau brickworks, amid smoke, terrors, sighs, and saints' names, under four skirts of identical color, under the slanting rain and the smoke-filled eyes of two rural constables asking uninspired questions, was begotten by the short but stocky Joseph Koljaiczek.

That very night my grandmother Anna Bronski changed her name; with the help of a priest who was generous with the sacraments, she had herself metamorphosed into Anna Koljaiczek and followed Joseph, if not into Egypt, at least to the provincial capital on the river Mottlau, where Joseph found work as a raftsman and temporary peace from the constabulary.

Just to heighten the suspense, I'm going to wait a while before telling you the name of the city at the mouth of the Mottlau, though there's ample reason for mentioning it right now because it is there that my mama first saw the light of day. At the end of July, 1900—they were just deciding to double the imperial naval building program—my mother was born under the sign of Leo. Self-confident, romantic, generous, and vain. The first house, known also as *domus vitae*, in the sign of the ascendant: Pisces, impressionable. The constellation of the sun in opposition to Neptune, seventh house or *Domus matrimonii uxoris*, would bring

confusion. Venus in opposition to Saturn, which is termed the sour planet and as everyone knows induces ailments of the liver and spleen, which is dominant in Capricorn and meets its end in Leo, to which Neptune offers eels and receives the mole in return, which loves belladonna, onions, and beets, which coughs lava and sours the wine; it lived with Venus in the eighth house, the house of death; that augured accidental death, while the fact of being begotten in the potato field gave promise of hazardous happiness under the protection of Mercury in the house of relatives.

Here I must put in a protest from my mama, for she always denied having been begotten in the potato field. It was true—this much she admitted—that her father had done his best on that memorable occasion, but neither his position nor that of Anna Bronski had been such as to favor impregnation. "It must have happened later that night, maybe in Uncle Vincent's boxcart, or maybe still later in Troyl when the raftsmen took us in."

My mama liked to date the beginnings of her existence with words such as these, and then my grandmother, who must have known, would nod patiently and say: "Yes, child, it must have been in the cart or later in Troyl. It couldn't have been in the field, 'cause it was windy and raining all getout."

Vincent was my grandmother's brother. His wife had died young and then he had gone on a pilgrimage to Czestochowa where the Matka Boska Czestochowska had enjoined him to consider her as the future queen of Poland. Since then he had spent all his time poking around in strange books, and every sentence he read was a confirmation of the Virgin Mother's claim to the Polish throne. He had let his sister look after the house and the few acres of land. Jan, his son, then four years of age, a sickly child always on the verge of tears, tended the geese; he also collected little colored pictures and, at an ominously early age, stamps.

To this little farm dedicated to the heavenly Queen of Poland, my grandmother brought her potato baskets and Koljaiczek. Learning the lay of the land, Vincent hurried over to Ramkau and stirred up the priest, telling him to come quick with the sacraments and unite Anna and Joseph in holy wedlock. Scarcely had the reverend father, groggy with sleep, given his long yawned-out blessing and, rewarded with a good side of bacon, turned his consecrated back than Vincent harnessed the horse to the boxcart, bedded the

newlyweds down in straw and empty potato sacks, propped up little Jan, shivering and wispily weeping beside him on the driver's seat, and gave the horse to understand that he was to put straight out into the night: the honeymooners were in a hurry.

The night was still dark though far advanced when the vehicle reached the timber port in the provincial capital. There Koljaiczek found friends and fellow raftsmen who sheltered the fugitive pair. Vincent turned about and headed back to Bissau; a cow, a goat, the sow with her porkers, eight geese, and the dog demanded to be fed, while little Jan had developed a slight fever and had to be put to bed.

Joseph Koljaiczek remained in hiding for three weeks. He trained his hair to take a part, shaved his mustache, provided himself with unblemished papers, and found work as a raftsman under the name of Joseph Wranka. But why did Koljaiczek have to apply for work with the papers of one Joseph Wranka, who had been knocked off a raft in a fight and, unbeknownst to the authorities, drowned in the river Bug just above Modlin? Because, having given up rafting for a time and gone to work in a sawmill at Schwetz, he had had a bit of trouble with the boss over a fence which he, Koljaiczek, had painted a provocative white and red. Whereupon the boss had broken one white and one red slat out of the fence and smashed the patriotic slats into tinder over Koljaiczek's Kashubian back. To Koljaiczek this had seemed ground enough for setting red fire to the brand-new, resplendently whitewashed sawmill the very next night a stately night no doubt, in honor of a partitioned but for this very reason united Poland.

And so Koljaiczek became a firebug, and not just once, for throughout West Prussia in the days that followed sawmills and woodlots provided fuel for a blazing broiled national sentiment. As always where the future of Poland is at stake, the Virgin Mary was in on the proceedings, and there were witnesses—some of them may still be alive—who claimed to have seen the Mother of God beset with the crown of Poland, enthroned on the splashing roof of several sawmills. The crowd that always turns up at any fire is said to have struck up the hymn to the Virgin Mary. Mother of God—Koljaiczek's first, as here every nation to believe, were solemn affairs, and solemn things were done.

And so Koljaiczek was wanted as an incendiary. When the raftsman Joseph Wranka, a handsome fellow with an

reproachable past and no parents, a man of limited horizon whom no one was looking for and hardly anyone even knew, had divided his chewing tobacco into daily rations, until one day he was gathered in by the river Bug, leaving behind him three daily rations of tobacco and his papers in the pocket of his jacket. And since Wranka, once drowned, could no longer report for work and no one asked embarrassing questions about him, Koljaiczek, who had the same build and the same round skull, crept first into his jacket, then into his irreproachable official skin, gave up pipe-smoking, took to chewing tobacco, and even adopted Wranka's most personal and characteristic trait, his speech defect. In the years that followed he played the part of a hard-working, thrifty raftsman with a slight stutter, rafting whole forests down the Niemen, the Bobr, the Bug, and the Vistula. He even rose to be a corporal in the Crown Prince's Leib-Hussars under Mackensen, for Wranka hadn't yet done his military service, whereas Koljaiczek, who was four years older, had left a bad record behind him in the artillery at Thorn.

In the very midst of their felonious pursuits the most desperate thieves, murderers, and incendiaries are just waiting for an opportunity to take up a more respectable trade. Whether by effort or by luck, some of them get the chance: under the identity of Wranka, Koljaiczek was a good husband, so well cured of the fiery vice that the mere sight of a match gave him the shakes. A box of matches, lying smugly on the kitchen table, was never safe from this man who might have invented matches. He threw the temptation out of the window. It was very hard for my grandmother to serve a warm meal on time. Often the family sat in the dark because there was nothing to light the lamp with.

Yet Wranka was not a tyrant. On Sunday he took his Anna Wranka to church in the lower city and allowed her, his legally wedded wife, to wear four superimposed skirts, just as she had done in the potato field. In winter when the rivers were frozen over and the raftsmen were laid off, he sat quietly at home in Troyl, where only raftsmen, longshoremen, and wharf hands lived, and supervised the upbringing of his daughter Agnes, who seemed to take after her father, for when she was not under the bed she was in the clothes cupboard, and when there were visitors, she was under the table with her rag dolls.

The essential for little Agnes was to remain hidden; in hiding she found other pleasures but the same security as

Joseph had found under Anna's skirts. Koljaiczek the incendiary had been sufficiently burnt to understand his daughter's need for shelter. When it became necessary to put up a rabbit hutch on the balcony-like appendage to their one-and-a-half-room flat, he built a special little house to her measure. Here sat my mother as a child, playing with dolls and getting bigger. Later, when she went to school, she is said to have thrown away the dolls and shown her first concern with fragile beauty in the form of glass beads and colored feathers.

Perhaps, since I am burning to announce the beginning of my own existence, I may be permitted to leave the family raft of the Wrankas drifting peacefully along, until 1913, when the *Columbus* was launched in Schichau; for it was then that the police, who never forget, caught up with Wranka.

The trouble began in August, 1913 when, as every summer, Koljaiczek was to help man the big raft that floated down from Kiev to the Vistula by way of the Pripet, the canal, the Bug, and the Modlin. Twelve raftsmen in all, they boarded the tugboat *Radaune*, operated by their sawmill, and steamed from Westlich Neufähr up the Dead Vistula to Einlage, then up the Vistula past Käsemark, Letzkau, Czattkau, Dirschau, and Pieckel, and tied up for the night at Thorn. There the new manager of the sawmill, who was to supervise the timber-buying in Kiev, came on board. By the time the *Radaune* cast off at four in the morning, word got around that he had come on. Koljaiczek saw him for the first time at breakfast in the galley. They sat across from one another, chewing and sipping up barley coffee. Koljaiczek knew him right off. Broad-shouldered and bald, the boss sent for vodka and had it poured into the men's empty coffee cups. In the midst of chewing, while the vodka was still being poured at the far end, he introduced himself: "Just so you know what's what, I'm the new boss. My name is Dückerhoff, I like order and I get it."

At his bidding, the crew called out their names one after another in their seating order, and drained their cups so their Adam's apples jumped. Koljaiczek drank first, then he said "Wranka," looking Dückerhoff straight in the eye. Dückerhoff nodded as he had nodded each time and repeated "Wranka" as he had repeated the names of the rest of the crew. Nevertheless it seemed to Koljaiczek that there was something special about Dückerhoff's way of saying

the dead raftsmen's name, not exactly pointed, but kind of thoughtful.

The *Radaune* pounded her way against the muddy current, deftly avoiding sandbanks with the help of changing pilots. To right and left, behind the dikes the country was always the same, hilly when it wasn't flat, but always reaped over. Hedges, sunken lanes, a hollow overgrown with broom, here and there an isolated farm, a landscape made for cavalry attacks, for a division of Uhlans wheeling in from the left across the sandbox, for hedge-leaping hussars, for the dreams of young cavalry officers, for the battles of the past and the battles to come, for heroic painting. Tartars flat against the necks of their horses, dragoons rearing, knights in armor falling, grand masters in blood-spattered mantles, not a scratch on their breastplates, all but one, who was struck down by the Duke of Mazowsze; and horses, better than a circus, bedecked with tassels, sinews delineated with precision, nostrils dilated, carmine red, sending up little clouds and the clouds are pierced by lowered lances hung with pennants, sabers part the sky and the sunset, and there in the background—for every painting has a background—pasted firmly against the horizon, a little village with peacefully smoking chimneys between the hind legs of the black stallion, little squat cottages with moss-covered walls and thatched roofs; and in the cottages the pretty little tanks, dreaming of the day to come when they too will sally forth into the picture behind the Vistula dikes, like light foals amid the heavy cavalry.

Off Wloclawek, Dückerhoff tapped Koljaiczek on the shoulder: "Tell me, Wranka, didn't you work in the mill at Schwetz a few years back? The one that burned down?" Koljaiczek shook his head heavily, as though he had a stiff neck, and managed to make his eyes so sad and tired that Dückerhoff kept any further questions to himself.

When Koljaiczek at Modlin, where the Bug flows into the Vistula and the *Radaune* turned into the Bug, leaned over the rail as the raftsmen did in those days and spat three times, Dückerhoff was standing beside him with a cigar and asked for a light. That little word, like the word "match," had a strange effect on Koljaiczek. "Man, you don't have to blush because I want a light. You're not a girl, or are you?"

It wasn't until after they left Modlin behind them that Koljaiczek lost his blush, which was not a blush of shame, but the lingering glow of the sawmills he had set on fire.

Between Modlin and Kiev, up the Bug, through the canal that joins the Bug and the Pripet, until the *Radaune*, following the Pripet, found its way to the Dniepr, nothing happened that can be classified as an exchange between Koljaiczek-Wranka and Dückerhoff. There was surely a bit of bad blood aboard the tug, among the raftsmen, between stokers and raftsmen, between helmsman, stokers, and captain, between captain and the constantly changing pilots; that's said to be the way with men, and maybe it really is. I can easily conceive of a certain amount of backbiting between the Kashubian logging crew and the helmsman, who was a native of Stettin, perhaps even the beginning of a mutiny: meeting in the galley, lots drawn, passwords given out, cutlasses sharpened. But enough of that. There were neither political disputes, nor knife battles between Germans and Poles, nor any mutiny springing from social grievances. Peacefully devouring her daily ration of coal, the *Radaune* went her way; once she ran aground on a sandbank—a little way past Plock, I think it was—but got off on her own power. A short but heated altercation between Captain Barbusch from Neufahrwasser and the Ukrainian pilot, that was all—and you wouldn't find much more in the log.

But if I had to keep a journal of Koljaiczek's thoughts or of Dückerhoff's inner life, there'd be plenty to relate: suspicion, suspicion confirmed, doubt, hesitation, suspicion laid at rest, more suspicion. They were both afraid. Dückerhoff more than Koljaiczek; for now they were in Russia. Dückerhoff could easily have fallen overboard like poor Wranka in his day, or later on in Kiev, in the timberyards that are so labyrinthine and enormous you can easily lose your guardian angel in their mazes, he could somehow have slipped under a suddenly toppling pile of logs. Or for that matter, he could have been rescued. Rescued by Koljaiczek, fished out of the Pripet or the Bug, or in the Kiev woodyard, so deplorably short of guardian angels, pulled at the last moment from the path of an avalanche of logs. How touching it would be if I could tell you how Dückerhoff, half-drowned or half-crushed, still gasping, a glimmer of death still barely discernible in his eyes, had whispered in the ostensible Wranka's ear: "Thank you, Koljaiczek, thanks old man." And then after the indispensable pause: "That makes us quits. Let bygones be bygones."

And with gruff bonhomie, smiling shamefacedly into each other's manly eyes with a twinkle that might almost have

been a tear, they would have clasped one another's diffident but horny hands.

We know the scene from the movies: the reconciliation between two enemy brothers, brilliantly performed, brilliantly photographed, from this day onward comrades forever, through thick and thin; Lord, what adventures they'll live through together!

But Koljaiczek found opportunity neither to drown Dückerhoff nor to snatch him from the jaws of death. Conscientiously, intent on the best interests of the firm, Dückerhoff bought his lumber in Kiev, supervised the building of the nine rafts, distributed a substantial advance in Russian currency to see the men through the return trip, and boarded the train, which carried him by way of Warsaw, Modlin, Deutsch-Eylau, Marienburg, and Dirschau back to his company, whose sawmill was situated in the timber port between the Klawitter dockyards and the Schichau dockyards.

Before I bring the raftsmen down the rivers from Kiev, through the canal and at last, after weeks of grueling toil, into the Vistula, there is a question to be considered: was Dückerhoff sure that this Wranka was Koljaiczek the firebug? I should say that as long as the mill boss had Wranka, a good-natured sort, well liked by all despite his very medium brightness, as his traveling companion on the tug, he hoped, and preferred to believe, that the raftsmen was not the desperado Koljaiczek. He did not relinquish this hope until he was comfortably settled in the train. And by the time the train had reached its destination, the Central Station in Danzig—there, now I've said it—Dückerhoff had made up his mind. He sent his bags home in a carriage and strode briskly to the nearby Police Headquarters on the Wiebenwall, leapt up the steps to the main entrance, and, after a short but cautious search, found the office he was looking for, where he submitted a brief factual report. He did not actually denounce Koljaiczek-Wranka; he merely entered a request that the police look into the case, which the police promised to do.

In the following weeks, while the logs were floating slowly downstream with their burden of reed huts and raftsmen, a great deal of paper was covered with writing in a number of offices. There was the service record of Joseph Koljaiczek, buck private in the so-and-soeth West Prussian Artillery regiment. A poor soldier, he had twice spent three days in the

guardhouse for shouting anarchist slogans half in Polish and half in German while under the influence of liquor. No such black marks were to be discovered in the record of Corporal Wranka, who had served in the second regiment of Leib-Hussars at Langfuhr. He had done well; as battalion dispatch runner on maneuvers, he had made a favorable impression on the Crown Prince and had been rewarded with a Crown Prince thaler by the Prince, who always carried a pocketful of them. The thaler was not noted in Corporal Wranka's military record, but reported by my loudly lamenting grandmother Anna when she and her brother Vincent were questioned.

And that was not her only argument against the allegation of arson. She was able to produce papers proving that Joseph Wranka had joined the volunteer fire department in Danzig-Niederstadt as early as 1904, during the winter months when the raftsmen are idle, and that far from lighting fires he had helped to put them out. There was also a document to show that Fireman Wranka, while fighting the big fire at the Troyl railroad works in 1909, had saved two apprentice mechanics. Fire captain Hecht spoke in similar terms when called up as a witness. "Is a man who puts fires out likely to light them?" he cried. "Why, I can still see him up there on the ladder when the church in Heubude was burning. A phoenix rising from flame and ashes, quenching not only the fire, but also the conflagration of this world and the thirst of our Lord Jesus! Verily I say unto you: anyone who sullies the name of the man in the fire helmet, who has the right of way, whom the insurance companies love, who always has a bit of ashes in his pocket, perhaps because they dropped into it in the course of his duties or perhaps as a talisman—anyone, I say, who dares to accuse this glorious phoenix of arson deserves to have a millstone tied round his neck and . . ."

Captain Hecht, as you may have observed, was a parson, a warrior of the word. Every Sunday, he spoke from the pulpit of his parish church of St. Barbara at Langgarten, and as long as the Koljaiczek-Wranka investigation was in progress he dinned parables about the heavenly fireman and the diabolical incendiary into the ears of his congregation.

But since the detectives who were working on the case did not go to church at St. Barbara's and since, as far as they were concerned, the word "phoenix" sounded more like *lèse-*

majesté than a disculpation of Wranka, Wranka's activity in the fire department was taken as a bad sign.

Evidence was gathered in a number of sawmills and in the town halls of both men's native places: Wranka had first seen the light of day in Tuchel, Koljaiczek in Thorn. When pieced together, the statements of older raftsmen and distant relatives revealed slight discrepancies. The pitcher, in short, kept going to the well; what could it do in the end but break? This was how things stood when the big raft entered German territory: after Thorn it was under discreet surveillance, and the men were shadowed when they went ashore.

It was only after Dirschau that my grandfather noticed his shadows. He had been expecting them. It seems to have been a profound lethargy, verging on melancholia, that deterred him from trying to make a break for it at Letzkau or Käsemark; he might well have succeeded, for he knew the region inside out and he had good friends among the raftsmen. After Einlage, where the rafts drifted slowly, tamping and thumping, into the Dead Vistula, a fishing craft with much too much of a crew ran along close by, trying rather conspicuously not to make itself conspicuous. Shortly after Plehnendorf two harbor police launches shot out of the rushes and began to race back and forth across the river, churning up the increasingly brackish waters of the estuary. Beyond the bridge leading to Heubude, the police had formed a cordon. They were everywhere, as far as the eye could see, in among the fields of logs, on the wharves and piers, on the sawmill docks, on the company dock where the men's relatives were waiting. They were everywhere except across the river by Schichau; over there it was all full of flags, something else was going on, looked like a ship was being launched, excited crowds, the very gulls were frantic with excitement, a celebration was in progress—a celebration for my grandfather?

Only when my grandfather saw the timber basin full of blue uniforms, only when the launches began crisscrossing more and more ominously, sending waves over the rafts, only when he became fully cognizant of the expensive maneuvers that had been organized all for his benefit, did Koljaiczek's old incendiary heart awaken. Then he spewed out the gentle Wranka, sloughed off the skin of Wranka the volunteer fireman, loudly and fluently disowned Wranka the stutterer, and fled, fled over the rafts, fled over the wide, teetering expanse, fled barefoot over the unplanned floor, from log to log toward

Schichau, where the flags were blowing gaily in the wind, on over the timber, toward the launching ceremony, where beautiful speeches were being made, where no one was shouting "Wranka," let alone "Koljaiczek," and the words rang out: I baptize you H.M.S. *Columbus*, America, forty thousand tons, thirty thousand horsepower, His Majesty's ship, first-class dining room, second-class dining room, gymnasium, library, America, His Majesty's ship, modern stabilizers, promenade deck, *Heil dir im Siegerkranz*, ensign of the home port. There stands Prince Heinrich at the helm, and my grandfather Koljaiczek barefoot, his feet barely touching the logs, running toward the brass band, a country that has such princes, from raft to raft, the people cheering him on, *Heil dir im Siegerkranz* and the dockyard sirens, the siren of every ship in the harbor, of every tug and pleasure craft, *Columbus*, America, liberty, and two launches mad with joy running along beside him, from raft to raft, His Majesty's rafts, and they block the way, too bad, he was making good time, he stands alone on his raft and sees America, and there are the launches. There's nothing to do but take to the water, and my grandfather is seen swimming, heading for a raft that's drifting into the Mottlau. But he has to dive on account of the launches and he has to stay under on account of the launches, and the raft passes over him and it won't stop, one raft engenders another: raft of thy raft, for all eternity: raft.

The launches stopped their motors. Relentless eyes searched the surface of the water. But Koljaiczek was gone forever, gone from the band music, gone from the sirens, from the ship's bells on His Majesty's ship, from Prince Heinrich's baptismal address, and from His Majesty's frantic gulls, gone from *Heil dir im Siegerkranz* and from His Majesty's soft soap used to soap the ways for His Majesty's ship, gone from America and from the *Columbus*, from police pursuit and the endless expanse of logs.

My grandfather's body was never found. Though I have no doubt whatever that he met his death under the raft, my devotion to the truth, the whole truth, compels me to put down some of the variants in which he was miraculously rescued.

According to one version he found a chink between two logs, just wide enough on the bottom to enable him to keep his nose above water, but so narrow on top that he remained invisible to the minions of the law who continued to search

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the rafts and even the reed huts until nightfall. Then, under cover of darkness—so the tale went on—he let himself drift until, half-dead with exhaustion, he reached the Schichau dockyard on the opposite bank; there he hid in the scrap-iron dump and later on, probably with the help of Greek sailors, was taken aboard one of those grimy tankers that are famous for harboring fugitives.

Another version is that Koljaiczek, a strong swimmer with remarkable lungs, had not only swum under the raft but traversed the whole remaining width of the Mottlau under water and reached the shipyard in Schichau, where, without attracting attention, he had mingled with the enthusiastic populace, joined in singing *Heil dir im Siegerkranz*, joined in applauding Prince Heinrich's baptismal oration, and after the launching, his clothes half-dried by now, had drifted away with the crowd. Next day—here the two versions converge—he had stowed away on the same Greek tanker of famed ill fame.

For the sake of completeness, I must also mention a third preposterous fable, according to which my grandfather floated out to sea like a piece of driftwood and was promptly fished out of the water by some fishermen from Bohnsack who, once outside the three-mile limit, handed him over to a Swedish deep-sea fisherman. After a miraculous recovery he reached Malmö, and so on.

All that is nonsense, fishermen's fish stories. Nor would I give a plugged nickel for the reports of the eyewitnesses—such eyewitnesses are to be met with in every seaport the world over—who claim to have seen my grandfather shortly after the First World War in Buffalo, U.S.A. Called himself Joe Colchic, said he was importing lumber from Canada, big stockholder in a number of match factories, a founder of fire insurance companies. That was my grandfather, a lonely multimillionaire, sitting in a skyscraper behind an enormous desk, diamond rings on every finger, drilling his bodyguard, who wore firemen's uniforms, sang in Polish, and were known as the Phoenix Guard.

Moth and Light, Book

A MAN LEFT everything behind him, crossed the great water, and became rich. Well, that's enough about my grandfather regardless of whether we call him Goljaczek (Polish), Koljaiczek (Kashubian), or Joe Colchic (American).

It's not easy, with nothing better than a tin drum, the kind you can buy in the dime store, to question a river clogged nearly to the horizon with log rafts. And yet I have managed by drumming to search the timber port, with all its driftwood lurching in the bights or caught in the rushes, and, with less difficulty, the launching ways of the Schichau shipyard and the Klawitter shipyard, and the drydocks, the scrap-metal dump, the rancid coconut stores of the margarine factory, and all the hiding places that were ever known to me in those parts. He is dead, he gives me no answer, shows no interest at all in imperial ship launchings, in the decline of a ship, which begins with its launching and sometimes goes on for as much as twenty or thirty years, in the present instance the decline of the H.M.S. *Columbus*, once termed the pride of the fleet and assigned, it goes without saying, to the North Atlantic run. Later on she was sunk or scuttled, then perhaps refloated, renamed, remodeled, or, for all I know, scrapped. Possibly the *Columbus*, imitating my grandfather, merely dived, and today, with her forty thousand tons, her dining rooms, her swimming pool, her gymnasium and massaging rooms, is knocking about a thousand fathoms down, in the Philippine Deep or the Emden Hollow; you'll find the whole story in Weyer's *Steamships* or in the shipping calendars—it seems to me that the *Columbus* was scuttled, because the captain couldn't bear to survive some sort of disgrace connected with the war.

I read Bruno part of my raft story and then, asking him to be objective, put my question to him.

"A beautiful death," Bruno declared with enthusiasm and

began at once to transform my poor drowned grandfather into one of his knotted spooks. I could only content myself with his answer and abandon all harebrained schemes of going to the U.S.A. in the hope of cadging an inheritance.

My friends Klepp and Vittlar came to see me. Klepp brought me a jazz record with King Oliver on both sides; Vittlar, with a mineing little gesture, presented me with a chocolate heart on a pink ribbon. They clowned around, parodied scenes from my trial, and to please them I put a cheerful face on it, as I always did on visiting days, and managed to laugh even at the most dismal jokes. Before Klepp could launch into his inevitable lecture about the relationship between jazz and Marxism, I told my story, the story of a man who in 1913, not long before the shooting started, was submerged under an endless raft and never came up again, so that they had never even found his body.

In answer to my questions—I asked them in a very off-hand manner, with an affectation of boredom—Klepp dejectedly shook his head over an adipose neck, unbuttoned his vest and buttoned it up again, made swimming movements, and acted as if he were under a raft. In the end he dismissed my question with a shake of his head, and said it was too early in the afternoon for him to form an opinion.

Vittlar sat stiffly, crossed his legs, taking good care not to disturb the crease in his pin-stripped trousers, and putting on the expression of eccentric hauteur characteristic only of himself and perhaps of the angels in heaven, said: "I am on the raft. It's pleasant on the raft. Mosquitoes are biting me, that's bothersome. I am under the raft. It's pleasant under the raft. The mosquitoes aren't biting me any more, that is pleasant. I think I could live very nicely under the raft if not for my hankering to be on the top of the raft, being molested by mosquitoes."

Vittlar paused as usual for effect, looked me up and down, raised his already rather lofty eyebrows, as he always did when he wished to look like an owl, and spoke in piercing theatrical tones: "I assume that this man who was drowned, the man under the raft, was your great-uncle if not your grandfather. He went to his death because as a great-uncle, or in far greater measure as a grandfather, he felt he owed it to you, for nothing would be more burdensome to you than to have a living grandfather. That makes you the murderer not only of your great-uncle but also of

your grandfather. However, like all true grandfathers, he wanted to punish you a little; he just wouldn't let you have the satisfaction of pointing with pride to a bloated, water-logged corpse and declaiming: Behold my dead grandfather. He was a hero. Rather than fall into the hands of his pursuers, he jumped in the river. Your grandfather cheated the world and his grandchild out of his corpse. Why? To make posterity and his grandchild worry their heads about him for many years to come."

Then, with a quick transition from one brand of pathos to another, he bent slightly forward and assumed the wily countenance of a purveyor of false consolation: "America! Take heart, Oskar. You have an aim, a mission in life. You'll be acquitted, released. Where should you go if not to America, the land where people find whatever they have lost, even missing grandfathers."

Sardonic and offensive as Vittlar's answer was, it gave me more certainty than my friend Klepp's ill-humored refusal to decide between life and death, or the reply of Bruno, my keeper, who thought my grandfather's death had been beautiful only because it had been immediately followed by the launching of the *Columbus*. God bless Vittlar's America, preserver of grandfathers, goal and ideal by which to rehabilitate myself when, weary of Europe, I decide to lay down my drum and pen: "Go on writing, Oskar. Do it for your grandfather, the rich but weary Koljaiczek, the lumber king of Buffalo, U.S.A., the lonely tycoon playing with matches in his skyscraper."

When Klepp and Vittlar had finally taken their leave, Bruno drove their disturbing aroma out of the room with a thorough airing. I went back to my drum, but I no longer drummed up the logs of death-concealing rafts; no, I beat out the rapid, erratic rhythm which commanded everybody's movements for quite some time after August, 1914. This makes it impossible for me to touch more than briefly on the life, up to the hour of my birth, of the little group of mourners my grandfather left behind him in Europe.

When Koljaiczek disappeared under the raft, my grandmother, her daughter Agnes, Vincent Bronski, and his seven-year-old son Jan were standing among the refugees' relatives on the sawmill dock, looking on in anguish. A little to one side stood Gregor Koljaiczek, Joseph's elder brother, who had been summoned to the city for questioning. Gregor had always had the same answer ready for the police: "I was

know my brother. All I'm really sure of is that he was called Joseph. Last time I saw him, he couldn't have been more than ten or maybe twelve years old. He shined my shoes and went out for beer when mother and I wanted beer."

Though it turned out that my great-grandmother actually did drink beer, Gregor Koljaiczek's answer was no help to the police. But the elder Koljaiczek's existence was a big help to my grandmother Anna. Gregor, who had spent most of his life in Stettin, Berlin, and lastly in Schneidemühl, stayed on in Danzig, found work at the gunpowder factory, and after a year's time, when all the complications, such as her marriage with the false Wranka, had been cleared up and laid at rest, married my grandmother, who was determined to stick by the Koljaiczeks and would never have married Gregor, or not so soon at least, if he had not been a Koljaiczek.

His work in the gunpowder factory kept Gregor out of the peacetime and soon the wartime army. The three of them lived together in the same one-and-a-half-room apartment that had sheltered the incendiary for so many years. But it soon became evident that one Koljaiczek need not necessarily resemble another, for after the first year of marriage my grandmother was obliged to rent the basement shop in Troyl, which happened to be available, and to make what money she could selling miscellaneous items from pins to cabbages, because though Gregor made piles of money at the powder works, he drank it all up; what he brought home wasn't enough for the barest necessities. Unlike Joseph my grandfather, who merely took an occasional nip of brandy, Gregor was a real drinker, a quality he had probably inherited from my great-grandmother. He didn't drink because he was sad. And even when he seemed cheerful, a rare occurrence, for he was given to melancholia, he didn't drink because he was happy. He drank because he was a thorough man, who liked to get to the bottom of things, of bottles as well as everything else. As long as he lived, no one ever saw Gregor Koljaiczek leave so much as a drop in the bottom of his glass.

My mother, then a plump little girl of fifteen, made herself useful around the house and helped in the store; she pasted food stamps in the ledger, waited on customers on Saturdays, and wrote awkward but imaginative missives to those who bought on credit, admonishing them to pay up. It's a pity that I possess none of these letters. How splendid if at this point I could quote some of my mother's girlish

cries of distress—remember, she was half an orphan, for Gregor Koljaiczek was far from giving full value as a step-father. Quite the contrary, it was only with great difficulty that my grandmother and her daughter were able to conceal their cashbox, which consisted of a tin plate covered by another tin plate and contained more copper than silver, from the sad and thirsty gaze of the gunpowder-maker. Only when Gregor Koljaiczek died of influenza in 1917 did the profits of the shop increase a little. But not much; what was there to sell in 1917?

The little room which had remained empty since the powder-maker's death, because my mama was afraid of ghosts and refused to move into it, was occupied later on by Jan Bronski, my mother's cousin, then aged about twenty, who, having graduated from the high school in Karthaus and served a period of apprenticeship at the post office in the district capital, had left Bissau and his father Vincent to pursue his career at the main post office in Danzig. In addition to his suitcase, Jan brought with him a large stamp collection that he had been working on since he was a little boy. So you see, he had more than a professional interest in the post office; he had, indeed, a kind of private solicitude for that branch of the administration. He was a sickly young man who walked with a slight stoop, but he had a pretty oval face with perhaps a little too much sweetness about it, and a pair of blue eyes that made it possible for my mama, who was then seventeen, to fall in love with him. Three times Jan had been called to the colors, but each time had been deferred because of his deplorable physical condition, a circumstance which threw ample light on Jan Bronski's constitution in those days, when every male who could stand half-way erect was being shipped to Verdun to undergo a radical change of posture from the vertical to the eternal horizontal.

Their flirtation ought reasonably to have begun as they were looking at stamps together, as their two youthful heads leaned over the perforations and watermarks. Actually it began or, rather, erupted only when Jan was called up for service a fourth time. My mother, who had errands in town, accompanied him to district headquarters and waited for him outside the sentry box occupied by a militiaman. The two of them were both convinced that this time Jan would have to go, that they would surely send him off to cure his ailing chest in the air of France, famed for its iron and lead content. It is possible that my mother

across at right angles as far as Schönfliess, looping round the forest of Saskoschin to Lake Ottomin, leaving Mattern, Ramkau, and my grandmother's Bissau to one side, and returning to the Baltic at Klein-Katz—was proclaimed a free state under League of Nations control. In the city itself Poland was given a free port, the Westerplatte including the munitions depot, the railroad administration and a post office of its own on the Heveliusplatz.

The postage stamps of the Free City were resplendent with red and gold Hanseatic heraldry, while the Poles sent out their mail marked with scenes from the lives of Casimir and Batory, all in macabre violet.

Jan Bronski opted for Poland and transferred to the Polish Post Office. The gesture seemed spontaneous and was generally interpreted as a reaction to my mother's infidelity. In 1920, when Marszalek Pilsudski defeated the Red Army at Warsaw, a miracle which Vincent Bronski and others like him attributed to the Virgin Mary and the military experts either to General Sikorski or to General Weygand—in that eminently Polish year, my mother became engaged to Matzerath, a citizen of the German Reich. I am inclined to believe that my grandmother Anna was hardly more pleased about it than Jan. Leaving the cellar shop in Troyl, which had meanwhile become rather prosperous, to her daughter, she moved to her brother Vincent's place at Bissau, which was Polish territory, took over the management of the farm with its beet and potato fields as in the pre-Koljaiczek era, left her increasingly grace-ridden brother to his dialogues with the Virgin Queen of Poland, and went back to sitting in four skirts beside autumnal potato-top fires, blinking at the horizon, which was still sectioned by telegraph poles.

Not until Jan Bronski had found and married his Hedwig, a Kashubian girl who lived in the city but still owned some fields in Ramkau, did relations between him and my mother improve. The story is that the two couples ran into each other at a dance at the Café Woyke, and that she introduced Jan and Matzerath. The two men, so different by nature despite the similarity of their feeling for Mama, took a shine to one another, although Matzerath in loud, unvarnished Rhenish qualified Jan's transfer to the Polish Post Office as sheer damn-foolishness. Jan danced with Mama, Matzerath danced with the big, rawboned Hedwig, whose inscrutable bovine gaze tended to make people think she was pregnant. After that they danced with, around, and into one

first rented then purchased in installments; and under the revolving stool lay the pelt of some yellowish-white long-haired animal. Across from the piano stood the sideboard, black with cut-glass sliding panels, encased in black eggs-and-anchors. The lower doors enclosing the china and linen were heavily ornamented with black carvings of fruit; the legs were black claws; on the black carved top-piece there was an empty space between the crystal bowl of artificial fruit and the green loving cup won in a lottery; later on, thanks to my mama's business acumen, the gap was to be filled with a light-brown radio.

The bedroom ran to yellow and looked out on the court of the four-story apartment house. Please believe me when I tell you that the canopy over the citadel of wedlock was sky-blue and that under its bluish light a framed, repentant, and flesh-colored Mary Magdalene lay in a grotto, sighing up at the upper right-hand edge of the picture and wringing so many fingers that you couldn't help counting them for fear there would be more than ten. Opposite the bed stood a white-enameled wardrobe with mirror doors, to the left of it a dressing table, to the right a marble-covered chest of drawers; the light fixture hung on brass arms from the ceiling, not covered with satin as in the living room, but shaded by pale-pink porcelain globes beneath which the bulbs protruded.

I have just drummed away a long morning, asking my drum all sorts of questions. I wished to know, for instance, whether the light bulbs in our bedroom were forty or sixty watts. The question is of the utmost importance to me, and this is not the first time I have asked it of myself and my drum. Sometimes it takes me hours to find my way back to those light bulbs. For I have to extricate myself from a forest of light bulbs, by good solid drumming without ornamental flourishes I have to make myself forget the thousands of lighting mechanisms it has been my lot to kindle or quench by turning a switch upon entering or leaving innumerable dwellings, before I can get back to the illumination of our bedroom in Labesweg.

Mama's confinement took place at home. When her labor pains set in, she was still in the store, putting sugar into blue pound and half-pound bags. It was too late to move her to the hospital; an elderly midwife who had just about given up practicing had to be summoned from nearby Hertastrasse. In the bedroom she helped me and Mama to get away from each other.

Well, then, it was in the form of two sixty-watt bulbs that I first saw the light of this world. That is why the words of the Bible, "Let there be light and there was light," still strike me as an excellent publicity slogan for Osram light bulbs. My birth ran off smoothly except for the usual rupture of the perineum. I had no difficulty in freeing myself from the upside-down position so favored by mothers, embryos, and midwives.

I may as well come right out with it: I was one of those clairaudient infants whose mental development is completed at birth and after that merely needs a certain amount of filling in. The moment I was born I took a very critical attitude toward the first utterances to slip from my parents beneath the light bulbs. My ears were keenly alert. It seems pretty well established that they were small, bent over, gummed up, and in any case cute, yet they caught the words that were my first impressions and as such have preserved their importance for me. And what my ear took in my tiny brain evaluated. After meditating at some length on what I had heard, I decided to do certain things and on no account to do certain others.

"It's a boy," said Mr. Matzerath, who presumed himself to be my father. "He will take over the store when he grows up. At last we know why we've been working our fingers to the bone."

Mama thought less about the store than about outfitting her son: "Oh, well, I knew it would be a boy even if I did say once in a while that it was going to be a girl."

Thus at an early age I made the acquaintance of feminine logic. The next words were: "When little Oskar is three, he will have a toy drum."

Carefully weighing and comparing these promises, maternal and paternal, I observed and listened to a moth that had flown into the room. Medium-sized and hairy, it darted between the two sixty-watt bulbs, casting shadows out of all proportion to its wing spread, which filled the room and everything in it with quivering motion. What impressed me most, however, was not the play of light and shade but the sound produced by the dialogue between moth and bulb: the moth chattered away as if in haste to unburden itself of its knowledge, as though it had no time for future colloquies with sources of light, as though this dialogue were its last confession; and as though, after the kind of absolution that

light bulbs confer, there would be no further occasion for sin or folly.

Today Oskar says simply: The moth drummed. I have heard rabbits, foxes and dormice drumming. Frogs can drum up a storm. Woodpeckers are said to drum worms out of their hiding places. And men beat on basins, tin pans, bass drums, and kettledrums. We speak of drumfire, drumhead courts; we drum up, drum out, drum into. There are drummer hoys and drum majors. There are composers who write concerti for strings and percussion. I might even mention Oskar's own efforts on the drum; but all this is nothing beside the orgy of drumming carried on by that moth in the hour of my birth, with no other instrument than two ordinary sixty-watt bulbs. Perhaps there are Negroes in darkest Africa and others in America who have not yet forgotten Africa who, with their well-known gift of rhythm, might succeed, in imitation of African moths—which are known to be larger and more beautiful than those of Eastern Europe—in drumming with such disciplined passion; I can only go by my Eastern European standards and praise that medium-sized powdery-brown moth of the hour of my birth; that moth was Oskar's master.

It was in the first days of September. The sun was in the sign of Virgo. A late-summer storm was approaching through the night, moving crates and furniture about in the distance. Mercury made me critical, Uranus ingenious, Venus made me believe in comfort and Mars in my ambition. Libra, rising up in the house of the ascendant, made me sensitive and given to exaggeration. Neptune moved into the tenth house, the house of middle life, establishing me in an attitude between faith in miracles and disillusionment. It was Saturn which, coming into opposition to Jupiter in the third house, cast doubt on my origins. But who sent the moth and allowed it, in the midst of a late-summer thunderstorm roaring like a high school principal, to make me fall in love with the drum my mother had promised me and develop my aptitude for it?

Outwardly wailing and impersonating a meat-colored baby, I made up my mind to reject my father's projects, in short everything connected with the grocery store, out of hand, but to give my mother's plan favorable consideration when the time came, to wit, on my third birthday.

Aside from all this speculation about my future, I quickly realized that Mama and this Mr. Matzerath were not

The Photograph Album

I AM GUARDING a treasure. Through all the bad years consisting only of calendar days, I have guarded it, hiding it when I wasn't looking at it; during the trip in the freight car I clutched it to my breast, and when I slept, Oskar slept on his treasure, his photograph album.

What should I do without this family cemetery which makes everything so perfectly clear and evident? It has a hundred and twenty pages. On each page, four or six or sometimes only two photographs are carefully mounted, sometimes symmetrically, sometimes less so, but always in an arrangement governed by the right angle. It is bound in leather and the older it grows the stronger it smells of leather. At times my album has been exposed to the wind and weather. The pictures came loose and seemed so helpless that I hastened to paste them back in their accustomed places.

What novel—or what else in the world—can have the epic scope of a photograph album? May our Father in Heaven, the untiring amateur who each Sunday snaps us from above, at an unfortunate angle that makes for hideous foreshortening, and pastes our pictures, properly exposed or not, in His album, guide me safely through this album of mine; may He deter me from dwelling too long on my favorites and discourage Oskar's penchant for the tortuous and labyrinthine; for I am only too eager to get on from the photographs to the originals.

So much for that. Shall we take a look? Uniforms of all sorts, the styles and the haircuts change, Mama gets fatter and Jan gets flabbier, some of these people I don't even know, but I can guess who they are. I wonder who took this one, the art was on the downgrade. Yes, gradually the art photo of 1900 degenerates into the utilitarian photo of our day. Take this monument of my grandfather Koljaiczek and this passport photo of my friend Klepp. One need only hold them side by side, the sepia print of my grandfather and

this glossy passport photo that seems to cry out for a rubber stamp, to see what progress has brought us to in photography. And all the paraphernalia this quick photography takes. Actually I should find fault with myself even more than with Klepp, for I am the owner of the album and should have maintained certain standards. If there is a hell in wait for us, I know what one of the more fiendish torments will be: they will shut up the naked soul in a room with the framed photographs of his day: Quick, turn on the pathos: O man amid snapshots, passport photos. O man beneath the glare of flash bulbs, O man standing erect by the leaning tower of Pisa, O photomaton man who must expose his right ear if he is to be worthy of a passport! And—off with the pathos. Maybe this hell will be tolerable because the worst pictures of all are not taken but only dreamed or, if they are taken, never developed.

Klepp and I had these pictures taken and developed during our early days in Jülicher-Strasse, when we ate spaghetti together and made friends. In those days I harbored plans for travel. That is, I was so gloomy that I resolved to take a trip and, to that end, apply for a passport. But since I hadn't money enough to finance a real trip, including Rome, Naples, or at least Paris, I was glad of the lack of cash, for what could have been more dismal than to set out on a trip in a state of depression? But since we had enough money to go to the movies, Klepp and I in those days attended motion picture theaters where, in keeping with Klepp's taste, wild West films were shown, and, in response to my needs, pictures where Maria Schell was the tearful nurse and Borsche, as the surgeon, played Beethoven sonatas by the open window after a difficult operation, and displayed a lofty sense of responsibility.

We were greatly dissatisfied that the performances should take only two hours. We should have been glad to see some of the programs twice. Often we arose at the end, determined to buy tickets for the next showing. But once we had left the hall and saw the line waiting outside the box office, our courage seeped away. Not only the thought of a second encounter with the ticketseller but also the insolent stares with which total strangers mustered our physiognomies shamed us out of lengthening the line.

The upshot was that after nearly every show we went to a

photo studio not far from the Graf-Adolf-Platz and had passport pictures taken. We were well known and our entrance was greeted with a smile; however, we were paying customers and treated politely as such. As soon as the booth was free, we were pushed into it by a young lady—all I remember about her is that she was nice. She deftly set our heads at the right angle, first mine, then Klepp's, and told us to fix our eyes on a certain point, and a moment later a flash of light and a bell synchronized with it announced that six successive likenesses had been transferred to the plate.

Still stiff around the corners of the mouth, we were pressed into comfortable wicker chairs by the young lady, who nicely, but no more than nicely, and nicely dressed too, asked us to be patient for five minutes. We were glad to wait. For now we had something to wait for—our passport pictures—and we were curious to see how they would turn out. In exactly seven minutes the still nice but otherwise nondescript young lady handed us two little paper envelopes and we paid.

The triumph in Klepp's slightly protuberant eyes! As soon as we had our envelopes, we had ipso facto an excuse for repairing to the nearest beer saloon, for no one likes to look at his own passport pictures on the open, dusty street, standing amid all the noise and bustle and blocking the traffic. Just as we were faithful to the photo studio, we always went to the same saloon in Friedrichstrasse. We ordered beer, blood sausage, onions, and rye bread, and, even before our order came, spread out the slightly damp photographs over the little round table and, while partaking of our beer and blood sausage, which had arrived in the meantime, immersed ourselves in our own strained features.

We always brought along other photographs taken on the occasion of previous movie shows. This gave us a basis for comparison; and where there is a basis for comparison, there is also ground for ordering a second, third, fourth glass of beer, to create merriment, or, as they say in the Rhineland, *ambiance*.

I am not trying to say that a passport photo of himself can cure a gloomy man of a gloom for which there is no ground; for true gloom is by nature groundless; such gloom, ours at least, can be traced to no identifiable cause, and with its almost riotous gratuitousness this gloom of ours attained a pitch of intensity that would yield to nothing. If there

was any way of making friends with our gloom, it was through the photos, because in these serial snapshots we found an image of ourselves which, though not exactly clear, was—and that was the essential—passive and neutralized. They gave us a kind of freedom in our dealings with ourselves; we could drink beer, torture our blood sausages, make merry, and play. We bent and folded the pictures, and cut them up with the little scissors we carried about with us for this precise purpose. We juxtaposed old and new pictures, made ourselves one-eyed or three-eyed, put noses on our ears, made our exposed right ears into organs of speech or silence, combined chins and foreheads. And it was not only each with his own likeness that we made these montages; Klepp borrowed features from me and I from him: thus we succeeded in making new and, we hoped, happier creatures. Occasionally we gave a picture away.

We—I am speaking only of Klepp and myself, setting aside all synthetic photo-personalities—got into the habit of donating a photo to the waiter, whom we called Rudi, every time we saw him, and that happened at least once a week. Rudi, a type who ought to have had twelve children and at least eight wards, appreciated our distress; he had dozens of profiles of us and still more full-faced views, and even so his eyes were full of sympathy and he said thank you when after long deliberation and a careful process of selection we handed him his photo.

Oskar never gave any pictures to the waitress at the counter or to the redheaded young thing with the cigarette tray; it's not a good idea to give women pictures, for you never know what use they may make of them. Klepp, however, who with all his easy-going corpulence was a setup for the fair sex, who was communicative to the point of folly and required only a feminine presence to make him spill his innermost guts, must have given the cigarette girl a photo unbeknownst to me, for he became engaged to the snippety little thing and married her one day, because he wanted to have his picture back.

I have gotten ahead of myself and devoted too many words to the last pages of my album. The silly snapshots don't deserve it; however, if taken as a term of comparison, they may give you an idea how sublimely grandiose, how artistic if you will, the portrait of my grandfather Koljaiczek on the first page of the album still seems to me.

Short and stocky he stands there behind a richly carved

coffee table. Unfortunately he had himself photographed not as a firebug, but as Wranka the volunteer fireman. But the tight-fitting fireman's uniform with the rescue medal and the fireman's helmet that gives the table the aspect of an altar almost take the place of the incendiary's mustache. How solemn is his gaze, how full of all the sorrow of those sorrowful years. That proud though tragic gaze seems to have been popular and prevalent in the days of the German Empire; we find it again in Gregor Koljaiczek, the drunken gunpowder-maker, who looks rather sober in his pictures. Taken in Czestochowa, the picture of Vincent Bronski holding a consecrated candle is more mystical in tone. A youthful portrait of the sickly Jan Bronski is a record of self-conscious melancholy, achieved by the methods of early photography.

The women of those days were less expert at finding the expression suited to their personality. In the photographs taken shortly before the First World War even my grandmother Anna, who, believe me, was somebody, hides behind a silly glued-on smile that carries not the slightest suggestion of her four great, asylum-giving skirts.

During the war years they continued to smile at the photographer as he danced about beneath his black cloth. From this period I have a picture, double postcard size on stiff cardboard, of twenty-three nurses, including my mother, clustering timidly round the reassuring solidity of an army doctor. The nurses seem somewhat more relaxed in a picture of a costume ball attended by convalescent warriors. Mama ventures a wink and a rosebud mouth which despite her angel's wings and the tinsel in her hair seem to say that even angels have a sex. Matzerath is seen kneeling at her feet in a costume that he would have been only too glad to wear every day: he has on a starched chef's hat and he is even brandishing a ladle. But when wearing his uniform adorned with the Iron Cross Second Class, he too, like Koljaiczek and Bronski, peers into the distance with a wittingly tragic look, and in all the pictures he is superior to the women.

After the war the faces changed. The men look rather demobilized; now it is the women who rise to the occasion, who have grounds for looking solemn, and who, even when smiling, make no attempt to conceal an undertone of studied sorrow. Melancholy was becoming to the women of the twenties. With their little black spit curls they managed, whether

sitting, standing, or half-reclining, to suggest a harmonious blend of madonna and harlot.

The picture of my mama at the age of twenty-three—it must have been taken shortly before the inception of her pregnancy—shows a young woman with a round, tranquil face slightly tilted on a firm, substantial neck. But tilted or not, she is always looking you straight in the eye. Good solid flesh, but the effect of solidity is called into question by the melancholy smile of the day and by those eyes, more grey than blue, which seem to look upon the souls of her fellow men—and her own soul as well—as solid objects, something like teacups or cigarette holders. I should say that the look in my mama's eyes is something more than soulful.

Not more interesting, but easier to appraise and hence more revealing, are the group photos of that period. How beautiful, how nuptial the wedding dresses were in the days of the Treaty of Rapallo. In his wedding photo Matzerath is still wearing a stiff collar. A fine figure of a man, he looks distinctly elegant, almost intellectual. His right foot is thrust forward, and he rather resembles a movie actor of the day, Harry Liedtke perhaps. The dresses were short. My mama's wedding dress, white and accordion-pleated, reaches barely below the knee, showing her shapely legs and cunning little dancing feet in white buckled shoes. Other pictures show the whole bridal assemblage. Surrounded by people who dress and pose like city dwellers, my grandmother Anna and her grace-favored brother Vincent are always conspicuous for their provincial gravity and a confidence-inspiring air of un-sureness. Jan Bronski, who like my mama stems from the same potato field as his father and his Aunt Anna, manages to hide his rural Kashubian origins behind the festive elegance of a Polish postal official. He is small and frail amid these robust occupiers of space, and yet the extraordinary look in his eyes, the almost feminine regularity of his features, make him the center of every picture, even when he is on the edge of it.

For some time now I have been looking at a group picture taken shortly after the marriage. I have been compelled to take up my drum and drumsticks and, gazing at the faded brownish rectangle, attempt to conjure up the dimly visible three-cornered constellation.

The picture must have been taken in the Bronski flat in Magdeburger-Strasse not far from the Polish Students' House, for in the background we perceive a sunlit balcony of a type

seen only in the Polish quarter, half-concealed by the vine-like foliage of pole beans. Mama is seated, Matzerath and Jan Bronski are standing. But how she sits and how they stand! For a time I foolishly tried to plot the constellation of this triumvirate—for she gave the full value of a man—with the help of a ruler, a triangle, and a school compass that Bruno had to go out for. Starting with the angle between neck and shoulder, I drew a triangle; I spun out projections, deduced similarities, described arcs which met significantly outside the triangle, i.e., in the foliage, and provided a point, because I needed a point, a point of vantage, a point of departure, a point of contact, a point of view.

All I accomplished with my metaphysical geometry was to dig a number of small but annoying holes in the precious photo with the point of my compass. What, I cannot help wondering, is so remarkable about that print? What was it that made me seek and, if you will, actually find mathematical and, preposterously enough, cosmic references in it? Three persons: a woman sitting, two men standing. She with a dark marcel wave, Matzerath curly blond, Jan chestnut brown, combed back flat from the forehead. All three are smiling, Matzerath more than Jan Bronski; and both men a good deal more than Mama, for their smile shows their upper teeth while of her smile there is barely a trace in the corners of her mouth and not the least suggestion in her eyes. Matzerath has his left hand resting on Mama's right shoulder; Jan contents himself with leaning his right hand lightly on the back of the chair. She, her knees slightly to one side but otherwise directly facing the camera, has in her lap a portfolio which I took years ago for one of Jan's stamp albums, later reinterpreted as a fashion magazine, and more recently as a collection of movie stars out of cigarette packages. Her hands look as if she would begin to leaf through the album the moment the picture was taken. All three seem happy, as though congratulating one another on their immunity to surprises of the sort that can arise only if one member of the triumvirate should acquire a secret life—if he hasn't had one all along. In their tripartite solidarity, they have little need of the fourth person, Jan's wife Hedwig Bronski née Lemke, who may at that time have been pregnant with the future Stephan; all they needed her for was to aim the camera at them, so perpetuating their triangular felicity, photographically at least.

I have detached other rectangles from the album and held

them next to this one. Scenes showing either Mama with Matzerath or Mama with Jan Bronski. In one of these pictures is the immutable, the ultimate solution so clearly discernible as in the balcony picture. Jan and Mama by themselves: this one smacks of tragedy, money-grubbing, exaltation turning to surfeit, a surfeit of exaltation. Matzerath and Mama: here we find an atmosphere of conjugal weekends at home, a sizzling of cutlets, a bit of grumbling before dinner and a bit of yawning after dinner; jokes are told before going to bed, and the tax returns are discussed: here we have the cultural background of the marriage. And yet I prefer such photographed boredom to the distasteful snapshot of later years, showing Mama seated on Jan Bronski's lap in the Forest of Oliva near Freudenthal; because this last picture with its lewdness—Jan's hand has disappeared under Mama's skirt—communicates nothing but the mad passion of this unhappy pair, steeped in adultery from the very first day of Mama's marriage; Matzerath, I presume, was the disabused photographer. Here we see none of the serenity of the balcony picture, none of the delicate, circumspect little gestures which seem to have been possible only when both men were together, standing behind or beside Mama or lying at her feet as on the bathing beach at Heubude; see photo.

There is still another picture which shows the three protagonists of my early years forming a triangle. Though it lacks the concentration of the balcony scene, it emanates the same tense peace, which can probably be concluded only among three persons. We may get pretty sick of the triangle situations in plays; but come to think of it, what can two people do if left to themselves on the stage except dialogue each other to death or secretly long for a third? In my picture the three of them are together. They are playing skat. That is, they are holding their cards like well-organized fans, but instead of looking at their trumps and plotting their strategy, they are looking into the camera. Jan's hand lies flat, except for the raised forefinger, beside a pile of change; Matzerath is digging his nails into the tablecloth; Mama is indulging in a little joke which strikes me as rather good: she has drawn a card and is showing it to the camera lens but not to her fellow players. How easy it is with a single gesture, by merely showing the queen of hearts, to conjure up a symbol that is not too blatant; for who would not swear by the queen of hearts?

Skat—as everyone should know, skat can only be played three-handed—was not just a handy game for Mama and the two men; it was their refuge, their haven, to which they always retreated when life threatened to beguile them into playing, in one combination or another, such silly two-handed games as backgammon or sixty-six.

That's enough now for those three, who brought me into the world though they wanted for nothing. Before I come to myself, a word about Gretchen Scheffler, Mama's girl friend, and her baker consort Alexander Scheffler. He bald-headed, she laughing with her great equine teeth, a good half of which were gold. He short-legged, his feet when he is sitting down dangling several inches above the carpet, she always in dresses she herself had knitted, with patterns that could not be too intricate. From later years, photos of both Schefflers in deck chairs or standing beside lifeboats belonging to the "Strength through Joy" ship *Wilhelm Gustloff*, or on the promenade deck of the *Tannenberg* (East Prussian Steamship Lines). Year by year they took trips and brought souvenirs from Pillau, Norway, the Azores, or Italy safely home to their house in Kleinhammer-Weg, where he baked rolls and she embroidered cushion covers. When Alexander Scheffler was not talking, he never stopped moistening his upper lip with the tip of his tongue, a habit which Mazerath's friend, Greff the greengrocer who lived across the way, thought obscene and disgusting.

Although Greff was married, he was more scout leader than husband. A photo shows him broad, healthy, and unsmiling, in a uniform with shorts, wearing a scout hat and the braid of a leader. Beside him in the same rig stands a blond lad of maybe thirteen, with rather too large eyes. Greff's arm is thrown affectionately over his shoulder. I didn't know the boy, but I was later to become acquainted with Greff through his wife Lina and to learn to understand him.

I am losing myself amid snapshots of "Strength through Joy" tourists and records of tender boy-scout eroticism. Let me skip a few pages and come to myself, to my first photographic likeness.

I was a handsome child. The picture was taken on Pentecost, 1925. I was eight months old, two months younger than Stephan Bronski, who is shown on the next page in the same format, exuding an indescribable commonplaceness. My postcard has a wavy scalloped edge; the reverse side has lines for the address and was probably printed in a large edition for

barracks had formerly housed the Mackensen Hussars and in my time the Free City police. But since I remember no one who lived out there, I can only conclude that the picture was taken one day when my parents were paying a visit to some people whom we never, or only seldom, saw in the ensuing period.

Despite the wintry season, Mama and Matzerath, who flank the baby carriage, are without overcoats. Mama has on a long-sleeved embroidered Russian blouse: one cannot help imagining that the Tsar's family is having its picture taken in deepest, wintriest Russia, that Rasputin is holding the camera, that I am the Tsarevich, and that behind the fence Mensheviks and Bolsheviks are tinkering with homemade bombs and plotting the downfall of my autocratic family. But the illusion is shattered by Matzerath's correct, Central European, and, as we shall see, prophetic shopkeeper's exterior. We were in the quiet suburb of Hochstricss, my parents had left the house of our host just for a moment—why bother to put coats on?—just time enough to let their host snap them with little Oskar, who obliged with his cunningest look, and a moment later they would be deliciously warming themselves over coffee, cake, and whipped cream.

There are still a dozen or more snapshots aged one, two, and two and a half, lying, sitting, crawling, and running. They aren't bad; but all in all, they merely lead up to the full-length portrait they had taken of me in honor of my third birthday.

Here I've got it. I've got my drum. It is hanging in front of my tummy, brand-new with its serrated red and white fields. With a solemnly resolute expression, I hold the sticks crossed over the top of it. I have on a striped pull-over and resplendent patent leather shoes. My hair is standing up like a brush ready for action and in each of my blue eyes is reflected the determination to wield a power that would have no need of vassals or henchmen. It was in this picture that I first arrived at a decision which I have had no reason to alter. It was then that I declared, resolved, and determined that I would never under any circumstances be a politician, much less a grocer, that I would stop right there and remain as I was—and so I did; for many years I stayed the same size but clung to the same attitude.

Little people and big people, Little Claus and Great Tiny Tim and Carolus Magnus, David and Goliath, the Giant Killer and, of course, the giant; I remember

year-old, the gnome, the Tom Thumb, the pigmy, the Lilliputian, the midget, whom no one could persuade to grow. I did so in order to be exempted from the big and little catechism and in order not, once grown to five-foot-eight adulthood, to be driven by this man who face to face with his shaving mirror called himself my father, into a business, the grocery business, which as Matzerath saw it, would, when Oskar turned twenty-one, become his grownup world. To avoid playing the cash register I clung to my drum and from my third birthday on refused to grow by so much a finger's breadth. I remained the precocious three-year-old, towered over by grownups but superior to all grownups, who refused to measure his shadow with theirs, who was complete both inside and outside, while they, to the very brink of the grave, were condemned to worry their heads about "development," who had only to confirm what they were compelled to gain by hard and often painful experience, and who had no need to change his shoe and trouser size year after year just to prove that something was growing.

However, and here Oskar must confess to development of a sort, something did grow—and not always to my best advantage—ultimately taking on Messianic proportions; but what grownup in my day had eyes and ears for Oskar, the eternal three-year-old drummer?

Smash a Little Windowpane

I HAVE JUST described a photograph showing Oskar full length with drum and drumsticks, and at the same time disclosed what decisions, having had three years in which to mature, were definitely taken by Oskar as he was being photographed at his birthday party, not far from a cake with three candles. But now the album lies silent beside me, and I must speak of certain events about which it has nothing to say. Even if they do not explain why I continued to be three years old, there is no doubt that they happened, and what is more, that I made them happen.

From the very beginning it was plain to me: grownups will not understand you. If you cease to offer them any discernible growth, they will say you are retarded; they will drag you and their money to dozens of doctors, looking for an explanation if not a cure for your deficiency. Consequently I myself, in order to keep the consultations within tolerable limits, felt obliged to provide a plausible ground for my failure to grow, even before the doctor should offer his explanation.

A sunny day in September, my third birthday. An atmosphere of late summer reverie; even Gretchen Scheffler's laughter was muffled. Mama at the piano intoning airs from the *Gypsy Baron*, Jan standing behind her, his hand grazing her shoulder, giving himself an air of following the music. Matzerath in the kitchen, already getting supper. Grandma Anna with Hedwig Bronski and Alexander Scheffler moving over to sit with Greff, because the greengrocer always knew stories, boy-scout stories full of loyalty and courage; and in the background, the upright clock which didn't miss a single quarter-hour of that finespun September day. And since, like the clock, they were all so busy, and since a line ran from the *Gypsy Baron's* Hungary by way of Greff's boy scouts (who were touring the Vosges Mountains), past Mat-

a chaste and therefore merciless diamond, my voice cut through the doors of glass cabinets and, without losing its innocence, proceeded inside to wreak havoc on harmonious, graceful liqueur glasses, bestowed by loving hands and covered with a light film of dust.

It was not long before my talents became known the whole length of our street, from Brösener-Weg to the housing development by the airfield. Whenever I caught the attention of the neighborhood children, whose games—such as “Pickled herring, one, two, three” or “Where’s the Witch, black as pitch?” or “I see something you don’t see”—didn’t interest me in the slightest, the whole unwashed chorus of them would begin to squeal:

Smash a little windowpane,
Put sugar in the beer,
Mrs Biddle plays the fiddle,
Dear, dear, dear.

It was a silly, meaningless jingle and troubled me very little; I took up the simple rhythm, which was not without charm, and drummed my way from start to finish, through the little pieces and through Mrs Biddle. Thus drumming, I marched down the street and though I was not the Pied Piper, the children followed in my wake.

Even today, when Bruno is washing my windows, for instance, my drum, as often as not, will find a moment for the rhythm of that little jingle.

More irritating than the children’s lyrical mockery, especially for my parents, was the costly fact that every windowpane broken in the entire neighborhood by rowdies big or little was blamed on me and my voice. At first Mama conscientiously paid for the breakage, most of which was the work of slingshots, then at last she saw what was what and, putting on her frosty businesslike look, demanded proof when damages were claimed. And indeed, I was unjustly accused. Nothing could have been more mistaken at the time than to suppose that I was possessed by a childlike passion for destruction, that I was consumed by an unreasoning hatred of glass and glassware. Only children who play are destructive out of mischief. I never played, I worked on my drum, and as for my voice, its miraculous powers were mobilized, in the beginning at least, only in self-defense. It was only when my right to drum was threatened that I made

weapons of my vocal cords. If with the same tones and techniques I had been able to cut up Gretchen Scheffler's beastly, intricately embroidered tablecloths or to remove the somber polish from the piano, I should gladly have left all glassware intact. But tablecloths and varnish were impervious to my voice. It was beyond my powers to efface the pattern of the wallpaper with my screams, or by rubbing together two long-drawn-out tones as our Stone Age ancestors rubbed flints, to produce the heat that would produce the spark needed to kindle decorative flames in the tinder-dry curtains, spiced with tobacco smoke, or our living room windows. I never sang the leg off a chair in which Matzerath or Alexander Scheffler was sitting. I should gladly have defended myself in less destructive, less miraculous ways, but no other weapon was available; only glass heeded my commands, and had to pay for it.

It was shortly after my third birthday that I staged my first successful performance of this nature. I had been in possession of the drum for about four weeks and, conscientious as I was, I had pretty well worn it out. The serrated red and white cylinder still held top and bottom together, but the hole in the playing surface could not be overlooked; since I scorned to use the other side, it became larger and larger, spread out in all directions, and developed fierce jagged edges. Bits of tin worn thin by my drumming broke off, fell inside the drum, and at every beat set up a disgruntled clatter of their own; white specks of enamel, unequal to the hard life the drum had been leading, took up residence on the living room rug and the red-brown flooring of the bedroom.

It was feared that I would cut myself on the sharp edges. Particularly Matzerath, who had become exceedingly safety-minded since my fall from the cellar stairs, pleaded with me to be careful. Since, when I drummed, my violently agitated wrists were always close to the jagged edge of the crater, I must own that Matzerath's fears were not groundless, though they may have been exaggerated. Of course they could have forestalled all danger by giving me a new drum; but this was not their plan; they simply wanted to deprive me of my good old drum, which had taken the fall with me, which had gone to the hospital with me and come home with me, which accompanied me upstairs and down, over cobblestones and sidewalks, through "Pickled herring, one, two, three" and past "I see something you don't see" and "Where's the Witch".

—yes, they wanted to take it away from me and give me nothing in return. They tried to bribe me with some silly old chocolate. Mama held it out to me, pursing her lips. It was Matzerath who, with a show of severity, laid hands on my decrepit instrument. I clung to it with all my might. He pulled. My strength, which was barely enough for drumming, began to give out. Slowly, one red tongue of flame after another, the cylinder was slipping from my grasp. At this moment Oskar, who until then had passed as a quiet, almost too well-behaved child, succeeded in emitting that first annihilating scream: the polished round crystal which protected the honey-colored dial of our clock from dust and moribund flies burst and fell to the floor (for the carpet did not reach all the way to the base of the clock), where the destruction was completed. However, the inside of the precious mechanism incurred no harm; serenely the pendulum continued on its way, and so did the hands. Not even the chimes, which otherwise reacted almost hysterically to the slightest jolt, which would be thrown off kilter by the passage of a beer truck, were one bit dismayed by my scream; it was only the glass that broke, but it did a thorough job of it.

"The clock is broken!" cried Matzerath and let go of the drum. With a brief glance I convinced myself that nothing had happened to the clock proper, that only the glass was gone. But to Matzerath, as well as to Mama and Uncle Jan Bronski, who was paying his usual Sunday afternoon call, it seemed that the damage must be much more serious. They blanched, exchanged shifty, helpless glances, and reached for the nearest solid object, the tile stove, the piano, the sideboard. There they stood fast, afraid to budge. Jan Bronski's eyes were filled with supplication and I could see his parched lips move. I still believe that he was inwardly muttering a prayer, perhaps: "O Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world, *miserere nobis*." Three of these, followed by a "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof; say but the word . . ."

Naturally the Lord didn't say a thing. Besides, the clock wasn't broken, but just the glass. However, there is something very strange and childish in the way grownups feel about their clocks—in that respect, I was never a child. I am willing to agree that the clock is probably the most remarkable thing that grownups ever produced. Grownups have it in them to be creative, and sometimes, with the help of

ambition, hard work, and a bit of luck they actually are. But being grownups, they have no sooner created some epoch-making invention than they become a slave to it.

What, after all, is a clock? Without your grownup it is nothing. It is the grownup who winds it, who sets it back or ahead, who takes it to the watchmaker to be checked, cleaned, and when necessary repaired. Just as with the cuckoo that stops calling too soon, just as with upset salt-cellar, spiders seen in the morning, black cats on the left, the oil portrait of Uncle that falls off the wall because the nail has come loose in the plaster, just as in a mirror, grownups see more in and behind a clock than any clock can justify.

At length, Mama, who with all her flightiness had a cool head on her shoulders and whose very frivolity led her to put optimistic interpretations on all ostensible signs or portents, found words to save the situation.

"Shards are good luck!" she cried, snapping her fingers, brought dustpan and brush, and swept up the good luck.

If Mama's words are taken at face value, I brought my parents, relatives, friends, and even a good many total strangers plenty of good luck by screaming or singing to pieces any glassware belonging to or being used by persons who tried to take my drum away, including windowpanes, crystal bowls full of artificial fruit, full beer glasses, empty beer bottles, or those little flacons of vernal fragrance that laymen call perfume bottles, in short, any product whatever of the glass blower's art.

To limit the damage, for I have always been a lover of fine glassware, I concentrated, when they tried to take my drum away at night instead of letting me take it to bed with me, on shattering one or more of the four bulbs in our living room lamp. On my fourth birthday, at the beginning of September, 1928, I threw the whole assembled company—my parents, the Bronskis, Grandma Koljatschik and the Greffs, who had given me everything imaginable—tin soldiers, a sailboat, a fire engine, the tin drum I wanted me to play with tin soldiers and the tin drum, this fool fire engine, who were planning to take my battered but trusty old drum, to steal it away from me and leave me, in its place, this sailboat, which was not correctly rigged to boot—as I was saying, I threw the whole lot of them, who had eyes for the same purpose of taking me and my desires, into primordial darkness with a colossal

scream that demolished all four bulbs in our hanging lamp.

Ah, grownups! After the first cries of terror, after the first almost desperate demands for light, they grew accustomed to the darkness, and by the time my Grandma Koljaiczek, who aside from little Stephan Bronski was the only one who had nothing to gain by the darkness, had gone to the shop, with blubbering little Stephan hanging on her skirts, for candles and returned to the room bearing light, the rest of the company, by now in an advanced state of intoxication, had paired off strangely.

As was to be expected, Mama, with disheveled corsage, was sitting on Jan Bronski's lap. It was the opposite of appetizing to see Alexander Scheffler, the short-legged baker, almost submerged amid the billows of Mrs. Greff. Matzerath was licking Gretchen Scheffler's gold horse teeth. Only Hedwig Bronski sat alone with her hands in her lap, her cow's eyes pious in the candlelight, close but not too close to Greff the greengrocer, who, though he had had nothing to drink, was singing in a sad sweet voice, full of languor and melancholy. Turning toward Hedwig Bronski, he invited her to join him in a duet and together they sang a boy-scout song about a scoutmaster named Rübzahl whose spirit haunted the mountains of Bohemia.

I had forgotten Under the table sat Oskar with the ruins of his drum, coaxing a last vestige of rhythm from it. My feeble but regular drumbeats may well have been welcome to the ecstatically displaced persons who were sitting or lying about the room. For, like varnish, my drumming covered over the persistent sounds of smacking and sucking.

I stayed under the table when my grandmother came in like an angel of wrath with her candles, beheld Sodom and Gomorrah in the candlelight, flew into a rage that made her candles tremble, called them pigs the whole lot of them, and put an end both to the idyll and to Rübzahl's excursions in the mountains by sticking the candles on saucers, taking skat cards out of the sideboard, and throwing them down on the table, all the while comforting Stephan, who was still blubbering. Soon Matzerath put new bulbs in the old fixtures of our lamp, chairs were moved, beer bottles popped open; over my head, a game of skat began for a tenth of a pfennig a point. Mama proposed at the very start that the stakes be raised to a quarter of a pfennig, but this struck Uncle Jan as too risky and the game continued on

this niggardly level except when the stakes were raised by a double count or an occasional grand with four.

I felt fine under the table, in the shelter of the tablecloth. Lightly drumming, I fell in with the sounds overhead, followed the developments of the game, and in exactly an hour announced skat: Jan Bronski had lost. He had good cards, but he lost all the same. It was no wonder; he wasn't paying attention. His mind was on very different things than his diamonds without two. Right at the start, while still talking with his aunt, trying to tell her that the little orgy in the dark was nothing to get excited about, he had slipped off one shoe, and thrust forward, past my head, a grey sock with a foot in it, searching for, and finding, my mama's knee. Thereupon Mama had moved closer to the table and Jan, who, in response to Matzerath's bid, had just passed, lifted the hem of her dress with his toe, so enabling his entire inhabited sock, which luckily he had put on fresh that same day, to wander about between her thighs. I have to hand it to my mother, who in spite of this woolen provocation beneath the table managed, up there on the crisp tablecloth, to execute the most daring games, including clubs without four, accompanied by a flow of the sprightliest talk, and won while Jan, growing more and more intrepid under the table, lost several games which even Oskar would have carried to a successful conclusion with somnambulistic certainty.

Later on poor tired little Stephan joined me under the table and, quite at a loss to know what his father's trouser leg was doing under my mama's skirt, soon fell asleep.

Clear to slightly cloudy. Light showers in the afternoon. The very next day Jan Bronski came over, took away the wretched sailboat he had given me, and exchanged it for a drum at Sigismund Markus' toystore. Slightly wilted from the rain, he came back late in the afternoon with a brand-new drum of the model with which I had grown so familiar, with the same red flames on a white field, and held it out to me, at the same time withdrawing my old wreck, which had retained only the barest vestiges of its paint. As Jan gripped the tired drum and I the new one, the eyes of Jan, Mama, and Matzerath were glued on Oskar; I almost had to smile, goodness, did they think I clung to tradition for its own sake, that I was burdened by principles?

Without emitting the cry expected by all, without so much as a note of glass-destroying song, I relinquished the relic

and devoted myself with both hands to the new instrument. After two hours of attentive drumming, I had got the hang of it.

But not all the grownups around me proved as understanding as Jan Bronski. Shortly after my fifth birthday, in 1929—there had been considerable talk about the stock market crash in New York and I had begun to wonder whether my grandfather Koljaiczek, with his lumber business in far-off Buffalo, had also suffered losses—Mama, alarmed at my by now quite obvious failure to grow, took me by the hand and inaugurated our Wednesday visits to the office of Dr. Hollatz in Brunshofer-Weg. His examinations were interminable and exasperating, but I put up with them, because even at that tender age I was very much taken with the white dress of Sister Inge, Dr. Hollatz' assistant, which reminded me of Mama's much-photographed wartime activity as a nurse. Intense concentration on the new system of pleats in her uniform enabled me to ignore the stream of words, by turns sternly authoritative and unpleasantly uncleish, that poured from the doctor's lips.

His spectacles reflecting the furnishings of his office—lots of chrome, nickel, and smooth enamel; shelves and glass cabinets with neatly labeled bottles containing snakes, toads, salamanders, and the embryos of humans, pigs, and monkeys—Hollatz, after each examination, shook his head thoughtfully, leafed through my case history, questioned Mama about my fall, and quieted her when she began to vilify Matzerath, guilty now and forever of leaving the trap door open.

One Wednesday, after this had been going on for months, when Dr. Hollatz, probably in order to convince himself and perhaps Sister Inge as well that his treatment was bringing results, tried to take my drum away, I destroyed the greater part of his collection of snakes, toads, and embryos.

This was the first time Oskar had tried his voice on a whole set of filled and carefully sealed glasses. The success was unique and overwhelming for all present, even for Mama, who knew all about my private relation to glassware. With my very first trim, economical scream, I cut the cabinet in which Hollatz kept his loathsome curiosities wide open, and sent an almost square pane of glass toppling to the linoleum floor where, still preserving its square shape, it cracked into a thousand pieces. Then, lending my scream

greater relief and throwing economy to the winds, I shattered one test tube after another.

The tubes popped like firecrackers. The greenish, partly coagulated alcohol squirted and splashed, carrying its prepared, pale, gloomy-eyed contents to the red linoleum floor, and filling the room with so palpable a stench that Mama grew sick to her stomach and Sister Inge had to open the windows.

Dr. Hollatz managed to turn the loss of his collection to his advantage. A few weeks after my act of violence, he published an article about me, Oskar M., the child with the glass-shattering voice, in a medical journal. The theory with which Dr. Hollatz succeeded in filling more than twenty pages is said to have attracted attention in medical circles both in Germany and abroad, and led to a whole series of articles by specialists, both in agreement and disagreement. He sent Mama several copies of his article and the pride she took in it gave me food for thought. She never wearied of reading passages from it to the Greffs, the Schefflers, her Jan, and, regularly after dinner, to Matzerath. Even her customers were subjected to readings and were filled with admiration for Mama, who had a strikingly imaginative way of mispronouncing the technical terms. As for me, the first appearance of my name in periodical literature left me just about cold. My already keen skepticism led me to judge Dr. Hollatz' opusculum for what it essentially was: a long-winded, not unskillfully formulated display of irrelevancies by a physician who was angling for a professorship.

Today as he lies in his mental hospital, unable to damage even his toothbrush glass with his singing, with doctors of the same type as Hollatz coming in and out, giving him Rorschach tests, association tests, and tests of every other conceivable kind in the hope of finding a high-sounding name for the disorder that led to his confinement, Oskar likes to think back on the archaic period of his voice. In those early days he shattered glass only when necessary, but then with great thoroughness, whereas later on, in the heyday and decadence of his art, he exercised it even when not impelled by outward circumstances. Succumbing to the mannerism of a late period, he began to sing out of pure playfulness, becoming as it were a devotee of art for art's sake. He employed glass as a medium of self-expression, and grew older in the process.

sional gaps. "Sleep, or think of the Party," he replied after the briefest reflection.

Naturally this led me to Oskar's first experience with a schedule.

It began quite harmlessly with Auntie Kauer's kindergarten. Hedwig Bronski called for me every morning and took me, along with her Stephan, to Auntie Kauer's place in Posadowski-Weg, where we and six to ten other little urchins—a few were always sick—were compelled to play ad nauseam. Luckily my drum passed as a toy, I was never obliged to play with building blocks, and I was constrained to mount a rocking horse only when an equestrian drummer in a paper helmet was required. My drumming score was Auntie Kauer's black silk, extraordinarily buttonsome dress. Several times a day I unbuttoned her on my drum and once her dress was open buttoned it up again. She was all wrinkles and very skinny, I don't think it was her body I had in mind.

The afternoon walks down avenues bordered with chestnut trees to Jeschkentaler Forest, past the Gutenberg Monument, and up to the Erbsberg were so pleasantly tedious and angelically silly that even today I should be very glad to go on one of those picture-book outings, guided by Auntie Kauer's papery hand.

First we were harnessed, all six, eight, or twelve of us. The shaft was a pale-blue strip of knitted wool. To each side were attached six woolen bridles with bells, room for twelve children in all. Auntie Kauer held the reins, and we trotted along ahead of her tinkling and twittering, I sluggishly drumming, through the autumnal suburban streets. Now and then Auntie Kauer struck up "Jesus, for thee we live, Jesus, for thee we die" or "Star of the Sea, I greet thee." We filled the clear October air with "O Mary, help me" and "Swe-e-e-t Mother of God," and the passers-by found it very touching. When we came to the main street, the traffic had to stop for us. Street cars, automobiles, horse-drawn vehicles stood motionless as we carried the Star of the Sea across the avenue. There was a crackling as of paper when Auntie Kauer waved her hand to thank the policeman who had directed our crossing.

"Our Lord Jesus will reward you," she promised with a rustle of her silk dress.

Actually I was sorry when Oskar, in the spring of his seventh year, had to leave Fräulein Kauer and her buttons

full of boys my own age. Their mothers pressed against the wall opposite the window front, clutching in their arms the colored cornucopias covered with tissue paper that were traditional on the first day of school. The cornucopias towered above me. Mama was also carrying one of them.

As my mother led me in, the rabble laughed and the rabble's mothers as well. A pudgy little boy wanted to beat my drum. Not wishing to demolish any glass, I was obliged to give him a few good kicks in the shins, whereupon he fell down, hitting his well-combed head on a desk, for which offense Mama cuffed me on the back of my head. The little monster yelled. Not I, I only yelled when someone tried to take my drum away. Mama, to whom this public performance was very embarrassing, pushed me down behind the first desk in the section by the windows. Of course the desk was too high. But further back, where the rabble was still more freckled and uncouth, the desks were still higher.

I let well enough alone and sat calmly, because there was nothing to be uncalm about. Mama, who it seemed to me was still suffering from embarrassment, tried to disappear among the other mothers. Here in the presence of her peers she probably felt ashamed of my so-called backwardness. The peers all behaved as though their young dolts, who had grown much too quickly for my taste, were something to be proud of.

I couldn't look out the window at Fröbel's Meadow, for the level of the window sill was no more appropriate to my stature than was the size of the desk. Too bad. I would have been glad to gaze out at the meadow where, as I knew, scouts under the leadership of Greff the greengrocer were pitching tents, playing lansquenet, and, as befitted boy scouts, doing good deeds. Not that I was interested in their fulsome glorification of camp life. What appealed to me was the sight of Greff in his short pants. Such was his love of slender, wide-eyed, pale boys that he had donned the uniform of Baden-Powell, father of the boy scouts.

Cheated of the coveted view by the insidious architecture, I gazed up at the sky and was soon appeased. New clouds kept forming and drifting southwestward, as though that direction had some special attraction for clouds. I wedged my drum firmly between my knees and the desk, though it had never for so much as a beat thought of wandering off to southwestward. Oskar's head was protected in the rear by the back rest. Behind me my so-called schoolmates snarled,

complexities. The rabble behind me had long ceased their barbaric howls. I was beginning to fancy that my drum was teaching, educating my fellow pupils, making them into my pupils, when la Spollenhauer approached my desk. For a time she watched my hands and drumsticks, I wouldn't even say that her manner was inept; she smiled self-forgetfully and tried to clap her hands to my beat. For a moment she became a not unpleasant old maid, who had forgotten her prescribed occupational caricature and become human, that is, childlike, curious, complex, and immoral.

However, when she failed to catch my rhythm, she fell back into her usual rectilinear, obtuse, and to make matters worse underpaid role, pulled herself together as teachers occasionally must, and said: "You must be little Oskar. We have heard so much about you. How beautifully you drum! Doesn't he, children? Isn't our Oskar a fine drummer?"

The children roared, the mothers huddled closer together, Miss Spollenhauer was herself again. "But now," she piped with a voice like a pencil sharpener, "we shall put the drum in the locker; it must be tired and want to sleep. Then when school is out, you will have it back again."

Even before she had finished reeling off this hypocritical nonsense, she bared her close-clipped teacher's fingernails and ten close-clipped fingers tried to seize my drum, which, so help me, was neither tired nor sleepy. I held fast, clutching the red and white casing in the sleeves of my sweater. At first I stared at her, but when she kept on looking like a stencil of a public school teacher, I preferred to look through her. In Miss Spollenhauer's interior I found enough interesting material for three scabrous chapters, but since my drum was in danger, I tore myself away from her inner life and, my gimlet eyes drilling between her shoulder blades, detected, mounted on well-preserved skin, a mole the size of a gulden with a clump of long hairs growing in it.

I can't say whether it was because she felt herself seen through or whether it was my voice with which I gave her a harmless warning scratch on the lens of her right eyeglass: in any case, she suspended the show of force that had already blanched her knuckles. It seems likely that she could not bear the scraping on the glass, probably it gave her goose flesh. With a shudder she released my drum and, casting a look of reproach at my Mama, who was preparing to sink into the earth, declared: "Why, you are a wicked little Oskar." Thereupon she left me my wide-awake drum about-

religion I devoted not four, but, in accordance with sound theological principles, three triune and only-saving drumbeats.

But la Spollenhauer had no ear for subtleties. To her all drumming was equally repugnant. Once again she bared her ten truncated fingernails and once again they tried to seize my drum.

But before she had so much as touched it, I unleashed my glass-demolishing scream, which removed the upper panes from the three oversized windows. The middle windows succumbed to a second cry. Unobstructed, the mild spring air poured into the classroom. With a third shriek I annihilated the lower windowpanes, but this I admit was quite superfluous, pure exuberance as it were for la Spollenhauer had already drawn in her claws at the discomfiture of the upper and middle panes. Instead of assaulting the last remaining windowpanes out of pure and, from an artistic standpoint, questionable malice, Oskar would have done more wisely to keep an eye on la Spollenhauer as she beat a disorderly retreat.

Lord only knows where she found that cane. In any case it was suddenly at hand, vibrant in the classroom air now mingled with springtime air. Through this atmospheric mixture she wished it, endowing it with resiliency, with hunger and thirst for bursting skin, for the whistling wind, for all the rustling curtains that a wishing cane can impersonate. And down it came on my desk so hard that a violet streak sprang from my inkwell. Then, when I wouldn't hold out my hand to be whipped, she struck my drum. She struck my darling. She, la Spollenhauer, struck my instrument. What ground had she to strike? And if she was bent on hitting something, why my drum? What about the yokels behind me? Did it have to be my drum? By what right did she, who knew nothing, nothing whatsoever, about the drummer's art, assault and batter my drum? What was that glint in her eye? That beast ready to strike? What zoo had it escaped from, what did it lust for, what prey was it after? The very same beast invaded Oskar; rising from unknown depths, it rose up through the soles of his shoes, through the soles of his feet, rose and rose, investing his vocal cords and driving him to emit a rutting cry that would have sufficed to unglass a whole Gothic cathedral resplendent with the refracted light of a hundred windows.

In other words, I composed a double cry which literally

Raspoutine and the Alphabet

I HAVE JUST been telling my friend Klepp and Bruno my keeper, who listened with only half an ear, about Oskar's first experience with a school schedule. On the blackboard (I said) which provided the photographer with the traditional background for postcard-size pictures of six-year-old boys with knapsacks and cornucopias, these words were inscribed: My First School Day.

Of course the words could only be read by the mothers who, much more excited than their children, were standing behind the photographer. The boys, who were in front of the blackboard, would at best be able to decipher the inscription a year later, either at Easter time when the next first grade would turn up at school or on their own old photographs. Then and only then would they be privileged to read that these lovely pictures had been taken on the occasion of their first school day.

This testimonial to a new stage in life was recorded in Sütterlin script that crept across the blackboard with malignant angularity. However, the loops were not right, too soft and rounded. The fact is that Sütterlin script is especially indicated for succinct, striking statements, slogans for instance. And there are also certain documents which, though I admit I have never seen then, I can only visualize in Sütterlin script. I have in mind vaccination certificates, sport scrolls, and handwritten death sentences. Even then, I knew what to make of the Sütterlin script though I couldn't read it: the double loop of the Sütterlin M, with which the inscription began, smelled of hemp in my nostrils, an insidious reminder of the hangman. Even so, I would have been glad to read it letter for letter and not just dimly guess at what is said. Let no one suppose that I drummed in revolutionary protest and shattered glass so highhandedly at my first meeting with Miss Spollenhauer because I had already mastered my ABC's. Oh, no, I was only too well aware that this in-

Hedwig, who often took me to Steffens-Park to play in the sand pile with her two-year-old Marga, have possibly served as my preceptor. She was good-natured enough, but as dull-witted as the day is long. I also had to abandon any ideas about Dr. Hollatz' Sister Inge, who was neither dull-witted nor good-natured, for she was no common door-opener but a real and indispensable doctor's assistant and consequently had no time for me.

Several times a day I tramped up and down the steps of the four-story apartment house—there were more than a hundred of them—drumming in quest of counsel at every landing. I sniffed to see what each of the nineteen tenants was having for dinner, but I did not knock at any of the doors, for I recognized my future preceptor neither in old man Heilandt nor in Laubschad the watchmaker, and definitely not in the corpulent Mrs. Kater nor, much as I liked her, in Mother Truczinski.

Under the eaves dwelt Meyn the trumpet player. Mr. Meyn kept four cats and was always drunk. He played dance music at "Zinglers Höhe" and on Christmas Eve he and five fellow sots plodded through the snow-clad streets battling the frost with carols. One day I saw him in his attic: clad in black trousers and a white evening shirt, he lay on his back, rolling an empty gin bottle about with his unshod feet and playing the trumpet just wonderfully. He did not remove his instrument from his lips, but merely squinted vaguely round at me for a moment. He acknowledged me as his drummer accompanist. His instrument was no more precious to him than mine to me. Our duet drove his four cats out on the roof and set up a slight vibration in the gutter tiles.

When the music was finished and we lowered our instruments, I drew an old copy of the *Neueste Nachrichten* from under my sweater, smoothed out the paper, sat down beside the trumpeter, held out my reading matter, and asked him to instruct me in the big and little alphabets.

But Mr. Meyn had fallen directly from his trumpeting into a deep sleep. His spirit recognized only three repositories: his bottle of gin, his trumpet, and his slumber. It is true that for quite some time after that—to be exact, until he joined the band of the Mounted SA and temporarily gave up gin—we would quite frequently play unrehearsed duets in the attic for the benefit of the roof tiles, the chimneys, the pigeons, and the cats; but I could never get anything out of him as a teacher.

six gulden. If you want to play, there's plenty of potatoes and cabbages."

He took his nasty old book away and leafed expressionlessly through the pages, leaving me standing amid potatoes and several representatives of the cabbage family, white cabbage, red cabbage, savoy cabbage, Brussels sprouts, and kohlrabi, wretchedly lonely, for I had left my drum at home.

There was still Mrs. Greff, and after her husband's brush-off, I usually made my way to the matrimonial bedroom. Even then Mrs. Lina Greff would lie in bed for whole weeks, vaguely ailing; she smelled of decaying nightgown and though her hands were very active, one thing she never touched was a book that might have taught me anything.

It was not without a suspicion of envy that Oskar, in the weeks that followed, looked upon his contemporaries and their schoolbags from which dangled importantly the little sponges or cloths used for wiping off slates. Even so, he cannot remember having harbored such thoughts as: you've made your own bed, Oskar, you should have put a good face on the school routine; you shouldn't have made an everlasting enemy of la Spollenhauer. Those yokels are getting ahead of you. They have mastered the big or at least the little alphabet, whereas you don't even know how to hold the *Neueste Nachrichten* properly.

A suspicion of envy, I have said, and that is all it was. A little smell test is all that was needed to disgust me with school for all time. Have you ever taken a sniff of those inadequately washed, worm-eaten sponges appended to peeling, yellow-rimmed slates, those sponges which somehow manage to store up all the effluvia of writing and 'rithmetic, all the sweat of squeaking, halting, slipping slate pencils moistened with saliva? Now and then, when children on their way home from school laid down their bags to play football or Völkerball, I would bend down over those sponges steaming in the sun, and the thought came to me that if Satan existed, such would be the acrid stench of his armpits.

Certainly I had no yearning for the school of slates and sponges. But, on the other hand, it would be an exaggeration to say that Gretchen Scheffler, who soon took his education in hand, was the precise answer to Oskar's dreams.

Everything about the Scheffler dwelling behind the bakery in Kleinhammer-Weg set my teeth on edge. Those ornamental coverlets, those cushions embroidered with coats-of-arms, those Käthe Kruse dolls lurking in sofa corners, those

changed books and borrowed books from the lending library by the Film-Palast, in the hope of imparting wider horizons and greater luster to their grocery store and bakery mariages.

Gretchen had little enough to offer me. Like Mama, who had given up reading in favor of Jan Bronski, she who no longer read, now that she spent all her time knitting, had evidently given away the sumptuous volumes of the book club, to which both had belonged for years, to people who still read because they did not knit and had no Jan Bronski.

Even bad books are books and therefore sacred. What I found there can only be described as miscellaneous; most of it came, no doubt, from the book chest of Gretchen's brother Theo, who had met a seaman's death on the Dogger-Bank. Seven or eight volumes of Köhler's *Naval Calendar*, full of ships that had long since sunk, the *Service Ranks of the Imperial Navy*, *Paul Beneke, the Naval Hero*—these could scarcely have been the nourishment for which Gretchen's heart had yearned. It seemed equally certain that Erich Keyser's *History of the City of Danzig* and *A Struggle for Rome*, which a man by the name of Felix Dahn seems to have fought with the help of Totila and Teja, Belisarius and Narses, had arrived at their present state of dilapidation beneath the hands of the seafaring brother. To Gretchen's own collection I attributed a book by Gustav Freytag about *Debit and Credit*, something by Goethe about *Elective Affinities*, and a copiously illustrated thick volume entitled: *Rasputin and Women*.

After long hesitation—the selection was too small to permit me to make up my mind quickly—I picked out first Rasputin and then Goethe. I had no idea what I was taking, I was just following the well-known inner voice.

The conflicting harmony between these two was to shape or influence my whole life, at least what life I have tried to live apart from my drum. To this very day—and even now that Oskar in his eagerness for learning is gradually plowing his way through the whole hospital library—I snap my fingers at Schiller and company and fluctuate between Rasputin and Goethe, between the faith healer and the man of the Enlightenment, between the dark spirit who cast a spell on women and the luminous poet prince who was so fond of letting women cast a spell on him. If for a time I inclined more toward Rasputin and feared Goethe's intolerance, it was because of a faint suspicion that if you, Oskar,

dominant was also made evident by the contemporary engravings scattered through the book, showing the bearded Rasputin with the coal-black eyes, surrounded by ladies wearing black stockings and nothing else. His death made a deep impression on me: they poisoned him with poisoned cake and poisoned wine; then, when he wanted more cake, they shot him with pistols, and when the lead in his chest made him feel like dancing, they bound him and lowered him into the Neva, through a hole in the ice. All this was done by officers of the male sex. The ladies of St. Petersburg would never have given their little father Rasputin poisoned cake, though they would have given him anything else he wanted. The women believed in him, whereas the officers had to get rid of him if they were ever again to believe in themselves.

Is it any wonder that I was not the only one to delight in the life and death of the athletic faith healer? Little by little Gretchen recovered her old pleasure in reading. Sometimes, as she read aloud, she would break down completely; she would tremble at the word "orgy" and utter it with a special sort of gasp; when she said "orgy" she was ready and willing for an orgy, though she certainly had very little idea of what an orgy might be.

Things took a salty turn when Mama came with me and attended my lesson in the flat over the bakery. Sometimes the reading degenerated into an orgy and became an end in itself; little Oskar's lesson was quite forgotten. Every third sentence produced a duet of giggles, which left the ladies with parched lips. Beneath Rasputin's spell the two of them moved closer and closer to one another; they would begin to fidget on the sofa cushions and press their thighs together. In the end, the giggling turned to moaning. Twelve pages of Rasputin produced results that they had hardly expected in mid-afternoon but were perfectly glad to accept. In any case Rasputin would not have minded; on the contrary, he may be counted on to distribute such blessings free of charge for all eternity.

At length, when both ladies had said "goodness, goodness" and sat back in embarrassment, Mama expressed some misgiving: "Are you sure little Oskar doesn't understand?" "Don't be silly," Gretchen reassured her, "You can't imagine how hard I work over him, but he just doesn't learn. My honest opinion is that he'll never be able to read."

As an indication of my incorrigible ignorance, she added: "Just imagine, Agnes, he tears the pages out of our Rasputin

Rasputin with fiery eyes and slightly tousled hair; her gold horse teeth moved but she had nothing to bite on, and she sighed mercy me, thinking of flour and dough, flour and dough. Since Mama, who had her Jan, had no way of helping Gretchen, this part of my education might have ended in grief if Gretchen had not been so buoyant of heart.

She would leap into the kitchen and come back with the coffee mill; embracing it like a lover, she would sing with melancholy passion while grinding, "Dark Eyes" or "Red Sarafan," and Mama would join in. Taking the Dark Eyes into the kitchen with her, she would put water on to boil; then as the water was heating over the gas flame, she would run down to the bakery and, often over Scheffler's opposition, bring back cakes and pastries, set the table with flowered cups, cream pitchers, sugar bowls, and cake forks, and strew pansies in the interstices. She would pour the coffee, hum airs from *The Tsarevich*, pass around the sand tarts and chocolate dewdrops. A soldier stands on the Volga shore, coffee ring garnished with splintered almonds, Have you many angels with you up there?, topped off with meringues filled with whipped cream, so sweet, so sweet. As they chewed, the conversation would come back to Rasputin, but now things appeared to them in their proper perspective, and once gluttoned with cake, they were even able to deplore, in all sincerity, the abysmal corruption of court life under the tsars.

I ate much too much cake in those years. As the photographs show, I grew no taller, just fat and lumpy. After the cloying sweetness of those lessons in Kleinhammer-Weg I would often sneak into our shop and await my opportunity. As soon as Matzerath had his back turned, I would tie a string around a piece of dry bread, dip the bread in the pickled herring barrel, and remove it only when the bread was saturated with brine. You can't imagine what a blissful emetic that was for one who had eaten too much cake. In the hope of reducing, Oskar would often vomit up a whole Danzig gulden's worth of Scheffler's cake in our toilet. That was a lot of money in those days.

I paid for Gretchen's lessons in still another way. With her passion for sewing, knitting, or crocheting baby clothes, she used me as a dressmaker's dummy. I was compelled to try on little frocks and little bonnets, little pants and little coats with and without hoods, in all styles, colors, and materials.

The Stockturn. Long-Distance Song Effects

DR. HORNSTETTER, THE lady doctor who drops in on me almost every day just long enough to smoke a cigarette, who is supposed to be taking care of me but who, thanks to my treatment, leaves the room after every visit a little less nervous than she was when she came, a retiring sort who is intimate only with her cigarettes, keeps insisting that I suffered from isolation in my childhood, that I didn't play enough with other children.

Well, as far as other children are concerned, she may be right. It is true that I was so busy with Gretchen Scheffler's lessons, so torn between Goethe and Rasputin, that even with the best of intentions I could have found no time for ring-around-a-rosy or post office. But whenever, as scholars sometimes do, I turned my back on books, declaring them to be the graveyards of the language, and sought contact with the simple folk, I encountered the little cannibals who lived in our building, and after brief association with them, felt very glad to get back to my reading in one piece.

Oskar had the possibility of leaving his parents' flat through the shop, then he came out on Labesweg, or else through the front door that led to the stairwell. From here he could either continue straight ahead to the street, or climb four flights of stairs to the attic where Meyn the musician was blowing his trumpet, or, lastly, go out into the court. The street was paved with cobblestones. The packed sand of the court was a place where rabbits multiplied and carpets were beaten. Aside from occasional duets with the intoxicated Mr. Meyn, the attic offered a view and that pleasant but deceptive feeling of freedom which is sought by all climbers of towers and which makes dreamers of those who live in attics.

While the court was fraught with peril for Oskar, the attic offered him security until Axel Mischke and his gang drove him out of it. The court was as wide as the building, but

One day when the children, as children do, were cooking soup not far from his shed, Nuchi Eyke asked old man Heilandt to spit in it three times. The old man obliged, each time with a cavernous clearing of the throat, and then disappeared into his shanty, where he went on hammering the crimps out of nails. Axel Mischke added some pulverized brick to the soup. Oskar stood to one side, but looked on with curiosity. Axel Mischke and Harry Schlager had built a kind of tent out of blankets and old rags to prevent grown-ups from looking into their soup. When the brick gruel had come to a boil, Hänschen Kollin emptied his pockets and contributed two live frogs he had caught in Aktien Pond. Susi Kater, the only girl in the tent, puckered up her mouth with disappointment and bitterness when the frogs vanished ingloriously into the soup without the slightest attempt at a swan song or a last jump. Undeterred by Susi's presence, Nuchi Eyke unbuttoned his fly and peed into the one-dish meal. Axel, Harry, and Hänschen Kollin followed suit. Shorty tried to show the ten-year-olds what he could do, but nothing came. All eyes turned toward Susi, and Axel Mischke handed her a sky-blue enamel cook pot. Oskar was already on the point of leaving. But he waited until Susi, who apparently had no panties on under her dress, had squatted down on the pot, clasping her knees, looking off expressionlessly into space, and finally crinkling her nose as the pot emitted a tinny tinkle, showing that Susi had done her bit for the soup.

At this point I ran away. I should not have run; I should have walked with quiet dignity. Their eyes were all fishing in the cook pot, but because I ran, they looked after me. I heard Susi Kater's voice: "What's he running for, he's going to snitch on us." It struck me in the back, and I could still feel it piercing me as I was catching my breath in the loft after hobbling up the four flights of steps.

I was seven and a half. Susi may have been nine. Shorty was just eight. Axel, Nuchi, Hänschen, and Harry were ten or eleven. There was still Maria Truczinski. She was a little older than I, but she never played in the court; she played with dolls in Mother Truczinski's kitchen or with her grown-up sister Guste who helped at the Lutheran kindergarten.

Is it any wonder if to this day I can't abide the sound of women urinating in chamberpots? Up in the attic Oskar appeased his ears with drumming. Just as he was beginning to feel that the bubbling soup was far behind him, the whole

my instrument intact except for an occasional crack in the enamel.

But let us get back to the days when I escaped periodically from our court with its carpet beating and its soup chefs, thanks to my mama, who took me every two weeks to Sigismund Markus' store, where I was permitted to select a new drum. Sometimes Mama let me come even when my old drum was in relatively good condition. How I relished those afternoons in the multicolored old city; there was always something of the museum about it and there was always a pealing of bells from one church or another.

Usually our excursions were pleasantly monotonous. There were always a few purchases to be made at Leiser's, Sternfeld's, or Machwitz'; then we went to Markus'. It had got to be a habit with Markus to pay Mama an assortment of the most flattering compliments. He was obviously in love with her, but as far as I know, he never went any further than to clutch my mother's hand, ardently described as worth its weight in gold, and to impress a silent kiss upon it—except for the time I shall speak of in a moment, when he fell on his knees.

Mama, who had inherited Grandma Koljaiczek's sturdy, imposing figure and her lovable vanity tempered with good nature, put up with Markus' attentions. To some extent, no doubt, she was influenced by the silk stockings—he bought them up in job lots but they were of excellent quality—which he sold her so cheap that they were practically gifts. Not to mention the drums he passed over the counter every two weeks, also at bargain prices.

Regularly at half-past four Mama would ask Sigismund if she might leave me, Oskar, in his care, for it was getting late and she still had a few important errands. Strangely smiling, Markus would bow and promise with an ornate turn of phrase to guard me, Oskar, like the apple of his eye, while she attended to her important affairs. The mockery in his tone was too faint to give offense, but sometimes it brought a blush to Mama's cheeks and led her to suspect that Markus knew what was what.

As for me, I knew all about the errands that Mama characterized as important and attended to so zealously. For a time she had let me accompany her to a cheap hotel in Tischlergasse, where she left me with the landlady and vanished up the stairs for exactly three-quarters of an hour. Without a word the landlady, who as a rule was sipping

displays: jewelry, books, fancy delicatessen. But desirable as these articles may have been, they were clearly beyond my reach. They did not hold me; I kept on going, through the passage and out to the Kohlenmarkt. Emerging in the dusty light, I stood facing the Arsenal. The basalt grey façade was larded with cannon balls dating back to various sieges, which recorded the history of the city of Danzig for the benefit of all who should pass by. The cannon balls were of no interest to me, particularly as I knew that they had not stuck in the wall of their own accord, that there lived in the city of Danzig a mason employed and paid conjointly by the Public Building Office and the Office for the Conservation of Monuments, whose function it was to immure the ammunition of past centuries in the façades of various churches and town halls, and specifically in the front and rear walls of the Arsenal.

I decided to head for the Stadt-Theater, whose portico I could see on the right, separated from the Arsenal only by a short unlighted alley. Just as I had expected, the theater was closed—the box office for the evening performance opened only at seven. Envisaging a retreat, I drummed my way irresolutely to leftward. But then Oskar found himself between the Stockturm and the Langgasser Gate. I didn't dare to pass through the gate into Langgasse and turn left into Grosse Wollwebergasse, for Mama and Jan Bronski would be sitting there; and if they were not there yet, it seemed likely that they had just completed their errand in Tischlergasse and were on their way to take their refreshing mochas on the little marble table.

I have no idea how I managed to cross the Kohlenmarkt, to thread my way between the streetcars hastening to squeeze through the arch or popping out of it with a great clanging of bells and screeching round the curve as they headed for the Holzmarkt and the Central Station. Probably a grownup, perhaps a policeman, took me by the hand and guided me through the perils of the traffic.

I stood facing the Stockturm, steep brick wall pinned against the sky, and it was only by chance, in response to a faint stirring of boredom, that I wedged my drumsticks in between the masonry and the iron mounting of the door. I looked upward along the brickwork, but it was hard to follow the line of the façade, for pigeons kept flying out of niches and windows, to rest on the oriels and waterspouts.

hawk or a vulture than to a dove, which is just about the most quarrelsome animal under God's heaven. To make a long story short: there were pigeons on the Stockturm. But after all, there are pigeons on every self-respecting tower.

At all events it was not pigeons that held my eyes but something different: the Stadt-Theater, which I had found closed on my way from the Arsenal. This box with a dome on it looked very much like a monstrosly blown-up neo-classical coffee mill. All the Temple of the Muses lacked was a crank with which to grind up its contents, actors and public, sets and props, Goethe and Schiller, slowly but exceeding small. The building annoyed me, especially the column-flanked windows of the lobby, sparkling in the rays of a sagging afternoon sun which kept mixing more and more red in its palette.

Up there on the tower, a good hundred feet above the Kohlenmarkt with its streetcars and throngs of homeward-bound office workers, high above Markus' sweet-smelling shop and the Café Weitzke with its cool marble table tops, two cups of mocha, far above Mama and Jan Bronski, above all courtyards, all bent and straightened nails, all juvenile soup-makers—up there on the tower, I who had hitherto screamed only for good and sufficient reason, became a gratuitous screamer. Until the day when I took it into my head to climb the Stockturm I had projected my cutting notes upon glasses, light bulbs, beer bottles, but only when someone wanted to take away my drum; now on the tower I screamed though my drum was not even remotely threatened.

No one was trying to take Oskar's drum away, and still he screamed. No pigeon had sullied his drum with its droppings. Near me there was verdigris on copper plates, but no glass. And nevertheless Oskar screamed. The eyes of the pigeons had a reddish glitter, but no one was eying him out of a glass eye; yet he screamed. What did he scream at? What distant object? Did he wish to apply scientific method to the experiment he had attempted for the hell of it in the loft after his meal of brick soup? What glass had Oskar in mind? What glass—and it had to be glass—did Oskar wish to experiment with?

It was the Stadt-Theater, the dramatic coffee mill, whose windowpanes gleaming in the evening sun attracted the modernistic tones, bordering on mannerism, that I had first tried out in our loft. After a few minutes of variously pitched screams which accomplished nothing, I succeeded in produc-

wagging the tip of his tongue and rubbing his yellowed white hands.

As I entered the shop the sight that met my eyes made me forget all about my success as a singer. Sigismund Markus was kneeling at Mama's feet, and all the plush animals, bears, monkeys, dogs, the dolls with eyes that opened and shut, the fire engines, rocking horses, and even the jumping jacks that guarded the shop, seemed on the point of kneeling with him. He held Mama's two hands in his, there were brownish fuzzy blotches on the backs of his hands, and he wept.

Mama also looked very solemn, as though she were giving the situation the attention it deserved. "No, Markus," she said, "please, Markus. Not here in the store."

But Markus went on interminably. He seemed to be overdoing it a little, but still I shall never forget the note of supplication in his voice. "Don't do it no more with Bronski, seeing he's in the Polish Post Office. He's with the Poles, that's no good. Don't bet on the Poles; if you gotta bet on somebody, bet on the Germans, they're coming up, maybe sooner maybe later. And suppose they're on top and Mrs. Matzerath is still betting on Bronski. All right if you want to bet on Matzerath, what you got him already. Or do me a favor, bet on Markus seeing he's just fresh baptized. We'll go to London, I got friends there and plenty stocks and bonds if you just decide to come, or all right if you won't come with Markus because you despise me, so despise me. But I beg you down on my knees, don't bet no more on Bronski that's meshugge enough to stick by the Polish Post Office when the Poles are pretty soon all washed up when the Germans come."

Just as Mama, confused by so many possibilities and impossibilities, was about to burst into tears, Markus saw me in the doorway and pointing five eloquent fingers in my direction: "Please, Mrs. Matzerath. We'll take him with us to London. Like a little prince he'll live."

Mama turned toward me and managed a bit of a smile. Maybe she was thinking of the paneless windows in the theater lobby or maybe it was the thought of London Town that cheered her. But to my surprise she shook her head and said lightly, as though declining a dance: "Thank you, Markus, but it's not possible. Really it's impossible—on account of Bronski."

Taking my uncle's name as a cue, Markus rose to his feet

The Rostroom

IT WAS IN singing away the lobby windows of our Stadt-Theater that I sought and found my first contact with the Thespian art. Despite Markus' attentions Mama must have observed my direct tie with the theater that afternoon, for when the Christmas holidays came, she bought four theater tickets, for herself, for Stephan and Marga Bronski, and for Oskar, and the last Sunday of Advent she took us to see the Christmas play. The fancy chandelier over the orchestra did its best to please, and I was glad I hadn't sung it to pieces.

Even in those days there were far too many children. In the balcony there were more children than mothers, while the balance was about even in the orchestra frequented by the more prosperous citizens, who were more cautious in their begetting and conceiving. Why can't children sit still? Marga Bronski, who was sitting between me and the relatively well-behaved Stephan, slid off her seat that promptly folded up, made a stab at climbing back again, but found it more interesting to do gymnastics on the balcony rail, got stuck in her folding seat, and started to scream, though no louder than the other little demons around us and only briefly, because Mama wisely poured candy into her open mouth. Sucking candy and tuckered out by her struggles with her seat, Marga fell asleep soon after the performance began, but had to be awakened after each act to clap, which she did with enthusiasm.

The play was *Tom Thumb*, which obviously had a special appeal for me and gripped me from the start. They did it very cleverly. They didn't show Tom Thumb at all, you only heard his voice and saw the grownups chasing around after him. He was invisible but very active. Here he is sitting in the horse's ear. Now his father is selling him to two tramps for good money, now he is taking a walk, very high and mighty, on the brim of one of the tramps' hats. Later he crawls into a mousehole and then into a snail shell. He joins a band of robbers, lies down with them, and along with a

been pasted in the album. And then good-by goldfish, good-by swans, good-by Whispering Grotto. Not only in the Castle Park was it Sunday but also outside the gate and in the streetcar bound for Glettkau, and in the Glettkau Casino, where we had lunch, while the Baltic, as though it had nothing else to do, held out an invitation to bathe; everywhere it was Sunday. As we approached Zoppot along the beach promenade, Sunday came out to meet us and Matzerath had to pay admission for the lot of us.

We bathed at South Beach because it was supposedly less crowded than North Beach. The men undressed in the men's cabins, Mama took me to a ladies' cabin where she, who was already beginning to overflow her banks, poured her flesh into a straw-colored bathing suit. I was expected to go naked. To put off my encounter with the thousands of eyes on the beach, I shielded my private parts with my drum and later lay down on my belly in the sand. The waters of the Baltic were inviting but I had no desire to go in, preferring to play the ostrich and shelter my modesty in the sand. Both Matzerath and Jan Bronski looked so ridiculous verging on pathetic with their incipient potbellies that I was glad when, late in the afternoon, we returned to the bath houses and, having anointed our sunburns, slipped back into Sunday civilian dress.

Coffee and cake at the Seestern. Mama wanted a third helping of the five-story cake. Matzerath was against, Jan was for and against. Mama ordered her cake, gave Matzerath a bite, fed Jan a spoonful, and, having provided for the well-being of her men, crammed the rest of the buttery-sweet wedge into her stomach, spoonful by spoonful.

O sacred butter cream, O clear to slightly cloudy Sunday afternoon dusted with powdered sugar! Polish nobles sat behind blue sunglasses and intense soft drinks that they did not touch. The ladies played with their violet fingernails and the sea breeze wafted over to us the mothflake smell of the fur capes they rented for the season. Matzerath thought the fur capes were idiotic. Mama would have loved to rent one, if only for a single afternoon. Jan maintained that the boredom of the Polish nobility had risen to such heights that despite mounting debts they had stopped speaking French and out of sheer snobbery taken to conversing in the most ordinary Polish.

We couldn't sit forever at the Seestern, studying the blue sunglasses and violet fingernails of the Polish nobility. Re-

out, full of foreigners. Even before it started, the mosquitoes were on hand. And only when the last mosquito, which always comes a little late, just to be chic, announced its arrival with a bloodthirsty buzzing, did the performance really get under way. It was *The Flying Dutchman*. A ship, looking more like a poacher than a pirate, drifted in from the woods that had given the Opera-in-the-Woods its name. Sailors began to sing at the trees. I fell asleep on Tuschel's upholstery, and when I woke up, the sailors were still singing, or maybe they were different sailors: Helmsman, keep watch . . . but Oskar fell asleep once more, happy even in dozing off that Mama, gliding with the waves and heaving in the true Wagnerian spirit, was taking so much interest in the *Dutchman*. She failed to notice that Matzerath and her Jan had covered their faces with their hands and were sawing logs of different thicknesses and that I too kept slipping through Wagner's fingers. Then suddenly Oskar awoke for good, because a woman was standing all alone in the forest, screaming for all she was worth. She had yellow hair and she was yelling because a spotlight, probably manipulated by the younger Formella, was blinding her. "No!" she cried. "Woe's me!" and: "Who hath made me suffer so?" But Formella, who was making her suffer, didn't divert the spotlight. The screams of the solitary woman—Mama referred to her afterward as a soloist—subsided to a muffled whimper, but only to rise again in a silvery bubbling fountain of high notes which blighted the leaves of the trees before their time but had no effect at all on Formella's spotlight. A brilliant voice, but its efforts were of no avail. It was time for Oskar to intervene, to locate that importunate source of light and, with a single long-distance cry, lower-pitched than the persistent buzzing of the mosquitoes, destroy it.

It was not my plan to create a short circuit, darkness, flying sparks, or a forest fire which, though quickly put out, provoked a panic. I had nothing to gain. Not only did I lose my mama and the two roughly awakened gentlemen in the confusion; even my drum got lost.

This third of my encounters with the theater gave my mama, who had begun, after that evening at the Opera-in-the-Woods, to domesticate Wagner in easy arrangements on our piano, the idea of taking me to the circus. It was put into effect in the spring of '34.

Oskar has no intention of chewing your ear off about trapeze artists darting through the air like streaks of silver,

about ferocious tigers or the incredible dexterity of the seals. No one fell headlong from the dome. Nothing was bitten off any of the animal-tamers. And the seals did just what they had been taught: they juggled with balls and were rewarded with live herring which they caught in mid-air. I am indebted to the circus for many happy hours and for my meeting, which was to prove so important in my life, with Bebra, the musical clown, who played "Jimmy the Tiger" on bottles and directed a group of Lilliputians.

We met in the menagerie. Mama and her two cavaliers were letting the monkeys make monkeys of them. Hedwig Bronski, who for once had come along, was showing her children the ponies. After a lion had yawned at me, I foolishly became involved with an owl. I tried to stare him down, but it was the owl that stared me down. Oskar crept away dismayed, with burning ears and a feeling of inner hurt, taking refuge between two blue and white trailers, because apart from a few tied-up dwarf goats, there were no animals here.

He was in suspenders and slippers, carrying a pail of water. Our eyes met as he was passing and there was instant recognition. He set down his pail, leaned his great head to one side, and came toward me. I guessed that he must be about four inches taller than I.

"Will you take a look at that!" There was a note of envy in his rasping voice. "Nowadays it's the three-year-olds that decide to stop growing." When I failed to answer, he tried again: "My name is Bebra, directly descended from Prince Eugene, whose father was Louis XIV and not some Savoyard as they claim." Still I said nothing, but he continued: "On my tenth birthday I made myself stop growing. Better late than never."

Since he had spoken so frankly, I too introduced myself, but without any nonsense about my family tree. I was just Oskar.

"Well, my dear Oskar, you must be fourteen or fifteen. Maybe as much as sixteen. What, only nine and a half? You don't mean it?"

It was my turn to guess his age. I purposely aimed too low.

"You're a flatterer, my young friend. Thirty-five, that was once upon a time. In August I shall be celebrating my fifty-third birthday. I could be your grandfather."

Oskar said a few nice things about his acrobatic clown act

and complimented him on his gift for music. That aroused my ambition and I performed a little trick of my own. Three light bulbs were the first to be taken in. Bravo, bravissimo, Mr. Bebra cried, and wanted to hire Oskar on the spot.

Even today I am occasionally sorry that I declined. I talked myself out of it, saying: "You know, Mr. Bebra, I prefer to regard myself as a member of the audience. I cultivate my little art in secret, far from all applause. But it gives me pleasure to applaud your accomplishments." Mr. Bebra raised a wrinkled forefinger and admonished me: "My dear Oskar, believe an experienced colleague. Our kind has no place in the audience. We must perform, we must run the show. If we don't, it's the others that run us. And they don't do it with kid gloves."

His eyes became as old as the hills and he almost crawled into my ear. "They are coming," he whispered. "They will take over the meadows where we pitch our tents. They will organize torchlight parades. They will build rostrums and fill them, and down from the rostrums they will preach our destruction. Take care, young man. Always take care to be sitting on the rostrum and never to be standing out in front of it."

Hearing my name called, Mr. Bebra took up his pail. "They are looking for you, my friend. We shall meet again. We are too little to lose each other. Bebra always says: Little people like us can always find a place even on the most crowded rostrum. And if not on it, then under it, but never out in front. So says Bebra, who is descended in a straight line from Prince Eugene."

Calling Oskar, Mama stepped out from behind a trailer just in time to see Mr. Bebra kiss me on the forehead. Then he picked up his pail of water and, swaying his shoulders, headed for his trailer.

Mama was furious. "Can you imagine," she said to Matzerath and the Bronskis. "He was with the midgets. And a gnome kissed him on the forehead. I hope it doesn't mean anything."

To me that kiss on the forehead was to mean a good deal. The political events of the ensuing years bore him out: the era of torchlight processions and parades past rostrums and reviewing stands had begun.

I took Mr. Bebra's advice, and Mama, for her part, followed a part of the advice Sigismund Markus had given her in Arsenal Passage and continued to repeat every Thursday.

often. He went out every Sunday morning after preparing the roast for dinner. This put me in an embarrassing situation, for Jan Bronski quickly grasped the new Sunday political situation and, incorrigible civilian that he was, took to calling on my poor forsaken mama while Matzerath was drilling and parading.

What could I do but make myself scarce? I had no desire to disturb the two of them on the sofa, or to spy on them. As soon as my uniformed father was out of sight and before the civilian, whom I already looked upon as my presumptive father, should arrive, I consequently slipped out of the house and drummed my way toward the Maiwiese.

Did it have to be the Maiwiese? you may ask. Take my word for it that nothing was doing on the waterfront on Sundays, that I had no inclination to go walking in the woods, and that in those days the interior of the Church of the Sacred Heart still had no appeal for me. There were still Mr. Greff's scouts, to be sure, but even at the risk of being thought a fellow traveler I must admit that I preferred the doings on the Maiwiese to the repressed eroticism of the scout meetings.

There was always a speech either by Greiser or by Löbsack, the district chief of training. Greiser never made much of an impression on me. He was too moderate and was later replaced as Gauleiter by a Bavarian named Forster, who was more forceful. But for Löbsack's humpback, it would have been hard for the Bavarian to get ahead in our northern seaport. Recognizing Löbsack's worth, regarding his hump as a sign of keen intelligence, the Party made him district chief of training. He knew his business. All Forster knew how to do was to shout "Home to the Reich" in his foul Bavarian accent, but Löbsack had a head for particulars. He spoke every variety of Danzig Plattdeutsch, told jokes about Bollermann and Wullsutski, and knew how to talk to the longshoremen in Schichau, the proletariat in Ohra, the middle class of Emmaus, Schidlitz, Bürgerwiesen, and Praust. It was a pleasure to hear the little man, whose brown uniform lent a special prominence to his hump, stand up to the feeble heckling of the Socialists and the sullen beer-drinker's aggressiveness of the Communists.

Löbsack had wit. He derived all his wit from his hump, which he called by its name; the crowd always likes that. Before the Communists would be allowed to take over he would lose his hump. It was easy to see that he was not

going to lose his hump, that his hump was there to stay. It followed that the hump was right and with it the Party—whence it can be inferred that a hump is an ideal basis for an idea.

When Greiser, Löbsack, or later Forster spoke, they spoke from the rostrum. This was one of the rostrums that little Mr. Bebra had commended. Consequently I long regarded Löbsack, who was humpbacked and gifted and spoke from a rostrum, as an emissary from Bebra, one who stood brown-clad on the rostrum fighting for Bebra's cause and mine.

What is a rostrum? Regardless of whom it is built for, a rostrum must be symmetrical. And that rostrum on our Maiwiese was indeed striking in its symmetry. From back to front: six swastika banners side by side; then a row of flags, pennants, standards; then a row of black-uniformed SS men who clutched their belt buckles during the singing and the speeches; then, seated, several rows of uniformed Party comrades; behind the speaker's stand more Party comrades, leaders of women's associations with motherly looks on their faces, representatives of the Senate in civilian garb, guests from the Reich, and the police chief or his representative.

The front of the rostrum was rejuvenated by the Hitler Youth or, more precisely, by the Regional Bands of the Hitler Young Folk and the Hitler Youth. At some of the demonstrations a mixed chorus, also symmetrically arranged, would recite slogans or sing the praises of the east wind, which, according to the text, was better than any other wind at unfurling banners.

Bebra, who kissed me on the forehead, had also said: "Oskar, never be a member of the audience. Never be standing out in front. The place for our kind is on the rostrum."

Usually I was able to find a place among the leaders of the women's associations. Unfortunately the ladies never failed to caress me for propaganda purposes during the rally. I couldn't slip in between the drums and trumpets at the foot of the platform because of my own drum, which the trooper musicians rejected. An attempt to enter into relations with Löbsack, the district chief of training, ended in failure. I had been sorrily mistaken in the man. Neither was he, as I had hoped, an emissary from Bebra, nor, despite his promising hump, had he the slightest understanding of my true stature.

On one of those rostrum Sundays I went up to him as he

stood near the pulpit, gave him the Party salute, looked brightly up at him for a moment, and then whispered with a wink: "Bebra is our leader!" But no light dawned. No, he patted me just like the ladies of the National Socialist women's associations and finally had Oskar removed from the platform—after all he had a speech to make. I was taken in hand by two representatives of the League of German Girls, who questioned me about my papa and mama all through the speech.

Thus it will come as no surprise when I tell you that by the summer of '34 I began to be disillusioned with the Party—the Roehm putsch had nothing to do with it. The longer I contemplated the rostrum from out in front, the more suspicious I became of its symmetry, which was not sufficiently relieved by Löbsack's hump. Of course Oskar's criticism was leveled first of all at the drummers and horn-blowers; and one sultry demonstration Sunday in '35, I tangled with the young drummers and trumpet-players at the foot of the reviewing stand.

Matzerath left home at nine o'clock. To get him out of the house on time, I had helped him shine his brown leather puttees. Even at that early hour it was intolerably hot, and even before he went out in the sun, there were dark and spreading spots of sweat under the arms of his Party shirt. At half past nine on the dot Jan Bronski arrived in an airy, light-colored summer suit, tender-grey, pierced oxfords, and a straw hat. Jan played with me for a while, but even as he played, he could not take his eyes off Mama, who had washed her hair the night before. I soon realized that my presence inhibited their conversation; there was a stiffness in her bearing and an air of embarrassment in Jan's movements. It was plain that he felt cramped in those summer trousers of his. And so I made off, following in the footsteps of Matzerath, though I did not take him as my model. Carefully I avoided streets that were full of uniformed folk on their way to the Maiwiese and for the first time approached the drill ground from the direction of the tennis courts which were beside the Sports Palace. Thanks to this indirect route, I obtained a rear view of the rostrum.

Have you ever seen a rostrum from behind? All men and women—if I may make a suggestion—should be familiarized with the rear view of a rostrum before being called upon to gather in front of one. Everyone who has ever taken a good look at a rostrum from behind will be immunized *ipso facto*

The drum was already in place. Supplely and tenderly I manipulated the sticks, imprinting an artful and joyous waltz rhythm upon it. Conjuring up Vienna and the Danube, I beat more and more loudly until the first and second bass drums of the troopers were drawn to my waltz and the kettledrums of the older boys took up my prelude with varying skill. Here and there, of course, there was a diehard, hard also of hearing no doubt, who went on playing boom-boom, whereas what I had in mind was the three-four time so beloved of the simple folk. Oskar was on the point of giving up when the trumpets saw the light and the fifes, oh, Danube, oh, how blue they blew! Only the leaders of the trumpeters' and the drummers' corps refused to bow to the waltz king and kept shouting their exasperating commands. But I had deposed them, the music was mine. The simple folk were full of gratitude. Laughter rang out close to the rostrum, here and there I heard singing, oh, Danube, and across the whole field so blue, as far as the Hindenburg-Allee so blue and the Steffens-Park so blue, my rhythm went hopping, amplified by the wide-open microphone above me. And when, still energetically drumming, I looked out into the open through my knothole, I saw that the people were enjoying my waltz, they were hopping about merrily, they had it in their legs: already nine couples and yet another couple were dancing, brought together by the waltz king. Only Löbsack, who appeared on the meadow followed by a long brown train of party dignitaries, Forster, Greiser, Lauschning, and others, whose passage to the rostrum was blocked by the crowd, stood there fuming and surprisingly disgruntled by my three-quarter time. He was used to being escorted to the rostrum by rectilinear march music. These frivolous sounds shook his faith in the people. Through the knothole I observed his sufferings. A draft was blowing through the hole. Though threatened with an inflammation of the eye, I felt sorry for him and changed over to a Charleston: "Jimmy the Tiger." I took up the rhythm that Bebra the clown had drummed in the circus on empty seltzer siphons; but the young troopers out in front didn't dig the Charleston. They belonged to a different generation. What could they know of the Charleston and "Jimmy the Tiger"? What those drums were pounding—oh, Bebra, my dear friend—wasn't Jimmy the Tiger, it was pure chaos, and the trumpets blew Sodom and Gomorrah. It's all one to us, thought the fifes. The trumpet leader cursed in all directions.

maneuvers. Suffice it to say that they did not find Oskar, because they were no match for him.

At least it was quiet in my wooden labyrinth, which was about the size of the whale's belly where Jonah sat staining his prophet's robes with blubber. But Oskar was no prophet, he was beginning to feel hungry. There was no Lord to say: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it." For me the Lord saw no need to make a gourd grow and send a worm to destroy it. I lamented neither for a biblical gourd nor for Nineveh, even if its name was Danzig. I tucked my very unbiblical drum under my sweater and concentrated on my own troubles. Carefully avoiding overhanging beams and protruding nails, I emerged by my own resources from the bowels of a rostrum intended for meetings and rallies of all sorts and which happened only by the merest accident to have the proportions of a prophet-swallowing whale.

Who would have noticed a wee mite of a three-year-old, whistling as he skirted the Maiwiese in the direction of the Sports Palace. Behind the tennis courts my boys from the rostrum were hopping about with their bass drums and kettle-drums, their fifes and trumpets. Punitive drill, I observed, as they hopped about in response to their leader's whistle. I felt only moderately sorry for them. Aloof from his assembled staff, Löbsack was walking up and down, alone with his hump. About-facing on the heels of his boots, he had managed to eradicate all the grass and daisies at the extremities of his course.

Dinner was on the table when Oskar reached home. There was meat loaf with boiled potatoes, red cabbage, and for dessert chocolate pudding with vanilla sauce. Matzerath didn't say a word. Mama's thoughts were somewhere else. But that afternoon there was a family quarrel hinging on jealousy and the Polish Post Office. Toward evening came a refreshing storm, a cloudburst accompanied by a fine drum solo of hail. Oskar's weary instrument was able to rest and listen.

Shopwindows

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, until November, '38, to be exact, my drum and I spent a good bit of our time huddling under rostrums, observing successful or not so successful demonstrations, breaking up rallies, driving orators to distraction, transforming marches and hymns into waltzes and fox trots.

Today I am a private patient in a mental hospital, and all that has become historical, old stuff, dead as a doornail, though still much debated and discussed. It has become possible for me to see my drumming under rostrums in proper perspective, and it would never occur to me to set myself up as a resistance fighter because I disrupted six or seven rallies and threw three or four parades out of step with my drumming. That word "resistance" has become very fashionable. We hear of the "spirit of resistance," of "resistance circles." There is even talk of an "inward resistance," a "psychic emigration." Not to mention those courageous and uncompromising souls who call themselves Resistance Fighters, men of the Resistance, because they were fined during the war for not blacking out their bedroom windows properly.

Let us cast one more glance beneath Oskar's rostrums. Did Oskar drum for the people? Did he, following the advice of Bebra his mentor, take the action in hand and provoke the people out in front of the rostrum to dance? Did he confound and perplex Löbsack, the shrewd and able chief of training? Did he, on a one-dish Sunday in August, 1935 and on several occasions thereafter, break up brown rallies on a drum which though red and white was not Polish?

Yes, I did all that. But does that make me, as I lie in this mental hospital, a Resistance Fighter? I must answer in the negative, and I hope that you too, you who are not inmates of mental hospitals, will regard me as nothing more than an eccentric who, for private and what is more esthetic reasons, though to be sure the advice of Bebra my mentor had something to do with it, rejected the cut and color of the uniforms, the rhythm and tone of the music normally played

on rostrums, and therefore drummed up a bit of protest on an instrument that was a mere toy.

In those days it was possible to reach the people on and in front of a rostrum with a wretched toy drum, and I must admit that I perfected this little trick, as I had my long-distance, glass-shattering song, for its own sake. For it was not only demonstrations of a brown hue that I attacked with my drumming. Oskar huddled under the rostrum for Reds and Blacks, for Boy Scouts and Spinach Shirts, for Jehovah's Witnesses, the Kyffhäuser Bund, the Vegetarians, and the Young Polish Fresh Air Movement. Whatever they might have to sing, trumpet, or proclaim, my drum knew better.

Yes, my work was destructive. And what I did not defeat with my drum, I killed with my voice. In the daytime I assaulted the symmetry of rostrums; at night—this was in the winter of '36 to '37—I played the tempter. My earliest instruction in the tempting of my fellow men was provided by my grandmother Koljaiczek, who in that hard winter opened a stand at the weekly market in Langfuhr: there she sat in her four skirts, crying plaintively: "Fresh eggs, golden creamy butter, geese not too fat, not too thin." Every Tuesday was market day. She took the narrow-gauge railway from Viereck; shortly before Langfuhr she removed the felt slippers she wore in the train, donned a pair of shapeless galoshes, took up her two baskets, and made her way to the stall in Bahnhofstrasse. Over it hung a sign: Anna Koljaiczek, Bissau. How cheap eggs were in those days! You could get two and a half dozen of them for one gulden, and Kashubian butter cost less than margarine. My grandmother's place was between two fish vendors who called: "Fresh flounder and cod!" The cold made the butter hard as stone, kept the eggs fresh, turned fish scales into extra-thin razor blades, and provided work for a one-eyed man named Schwerdtfeger who heated bricks over a charcoal fire, wrapped them in newspaper, and rented them out to the market women.

Every hour on-the dot Schwerdtfeger pushed a hot brick under my grandmother's four skirts with an iron rake. He pushed the steaming package under the scarcely lifted hems, discharged it, caught hold of the brick of the preceding hour, which was almost cold by now, and pulled it out.

How I envied those bricks wrapped in newspaper, those storehouses and bestowers of warmth! To this day I wish I could be a toasty warm brick, constantly exchanged for my-

had used me as a patient, making me swallow medicines that were not so sandy as the brick soup but had an aftertaste of putrid fish. My temptation was almost disembodied and kept its distance from its victims.

Long after nightfall, an hour or two after the shops closed, I slipped away from Mama and Matzerath and went out into the winter night. Standing in a doorway sheltered from the wind, I would peer across the silent, almost deserted streets at the nearby shopwindows, displays of delicatessen, haberdashery, shoes, watches, jewelry, all articles both desirable and easy to carry. All the windows were not illuminated. Indeed, I preferred those that were half in darkness, beyond the beam of the street lamps, because light attracts everyone, even the most commonplace people, while only the elect choose to linger in the penumbra.

I was not interested in the kind of people who in strolling by cast a glance into brightly lit shopwindows, more concerned with the price tags than the merchandise; nor did I concern myself with those who looked at themselves in the plate-glass panes to see if their hats were on right. The kind for whom I lurked in wait on crisp dry nights, on nights when the air was full of great silent snowflakes, or beneath the waxing wintry moon, were the kind who stopped to look in a shopwindow as though in answer to a call; their eyes did not wander about aimlessly, but quickly came to rest on a single object.

I was the hunter, they were my game. My work required patience, coolness, and a sure eye. It was my voice which felled the victim, painlessly and without bloodshed. By temptation. What sort of temptation?

The temptation to steal. With my most inaudible cry I made a circular incision in the shopwindow on a level with the bottom-most displays, close to the coveted article. And then, with a last vocal effort, I toppled the cut-out disk into the interior of the showcase. It fell with a quickly muffled tinkle, which however was not the tinkle of breaking glass. I did not hear it, Oskar was too far away; but the young woman in the threadbare brown coat with the rabbit collar heard the sound and saw the circular aperture, gave a start that sent a quiver through her rabbit fur, and prepared to set off through the snow, but stood still, perhaps because it was snowing and everything is permitted when it is snowing, provided it is snowing hard enough. Yet she looked round, suspicious of the snowflakes, looked round as though

knife folded up in his heart. He turned about, crossed the street waving his cane, and hurried past me and my doorway without noticing me, giving Oskar an opportunity to smile at his stricken countenance, yes, he looked as if the Devil had been giving him a good shaking. But there was a tinge of anxiety in my smile, for the poor old gentleman—and most of these veteran cigar-smokers were very very old—was visibly in a cold sweat and especially in changing weather I was afraid he might catch his death of cold.

Most of the stores in our suburb were insured against theft, and that winter the insurance companies had to pay out considerable indemnities. Though I never engineered any depredations on a large scale and purposely made my apertures so small that only one or two objects could be removed from the displays at a time, so many burglaries were reported that the police scarcely had a moment's rest and were nevertheless treated very harshly by the press. From November, '36 to March, '37, when Colonel Koc formed a National Front government in Warsaw, sixty-four attempted and twenty-eight successful burglaries of the same type were listed. Of course the majority of those salesmen, housemaids, old ladies, and pensioned high school principals had no vocation for theft and the police were usually able to recover the stolen articles next day; or else the amateur shoplifter, after the object of his desires had given him a sleepless night, could think of nothing better than to go to the police and say: "Mm, I beg your pardon. It will never happen again. Suddenly there was a hole in the glass and by the time I had halfway recovered from my fright and was three blocks away, I discovered to my consternation that I was illegally harboring a pair of wonderful calfskin gloves, very expensive I'm sure, in my coat pocket."

Since the police did not believe in miracles, all who were caught and all who went to the police of their own free will were given jail sentences ranging from four to eight weeks.

I myself was punished occasionally with house arrest, for of course Mama suspected, although she did not admit it to herself and—very wisely—refrained from communicating with the police, that my glass-cutting voice had something to do with the crime wave.

Now and then Matzerath would put on his stern, law-abiding face and try to question me. I refused to reply, taking refuge more and more astutely behind my drum and

with its jewelry and watches attracted a number of possible victims whom I should have shot down without hesitation if they had been looking at the other displays, at silk stockings, velvet hats, or liqueurs.

That is what jewelry does to you. You become slow and exacting, adapting your rhythm to endless circuits of beads. I no longer measured the time in minutes but in pearl years, figuring that the pearl outlasts the neck, that the wrist withers but not the bracelet, that rings but not fingers are found in ancient tombs; in short, one window-shopper struck me as too pretentious, another as too insignificant to bestow jewels on.

The showcase of Bansemer's jewelry store was not overcrowded. A few choice watches, Swiss quality articles, an assortment of wedding rings on sky-blue velvet, and in the center six or seven of the choicest pieces. There was a snake in three coils, fashioned in multicolored gold, its finely chiseled head adorned and made valuable by a topaz and two diamonds, with two sapphires for eyes. I am not ordinarily a lover of black velvet, but the black velvet on which Bansemer's snake lay was most appropriate, and so was the grey velvet which created a provocative quietness beneath certain strikingly harmonious articles of hammered silver. There was a ring with a gem so lovely that you knew it would wear out the hands of equally lovely ladies, growing more and more beautiful in the process until it attained the degree of immortality which is no doubt the exclusive right of jewels. There were necklaces such as no one can put on with impunity, necklaces that wear out their wearers; and finally, on a pale yellow velvet cushion shaped like a simplified neck base, a necklace of infinite lightness. Subtly, playfully woven, a web perpetually broken off. What spider can have secreted gold to catch six small rubies and one large one in this net? Where was the spider sitting, for what was it lurking in wait? Certainly not for more rubies; more likely for someone whose eye would be caught by the ensnared rubies which sat there like modeled blood—in other words: To whom should I, in conformity with my plan or the plan of the gold-secreting spider, give this necklace?

On the eighteenth of January, 1937, on crunching hard-trodden snow, in a night that smelled like more snow, the kind of night that is made to order for one who wishes to hold the snow responsible for anything that may happen. I saw Jan Bronski crossing the street not far from my obser-

with its jewelry and watches attracted a number of possible victims whom I should have shot down without hesitation if they had been looking at the other displays, at silk stockings, velvet hats, or liqueurs.

That is what jewelry does to you. You become slow and exacting, adapting your rhythm to endless circuits of beads. I no longer measured the time in minutes but in pearl years, figuring that the pearl outlasts the neck, that the wrist withers but not the bracelet, that rings but not fingers are found in ancient tombs; in short, one window-shopper struck me as too pretentious, another as too insignificant to bestow jewels on.

The showcase of Bansemer's jewelry store was not overcrowded. A few choice watches, Swiss quality articles, an assortment of wedding rings on sky-blue velvet, and in the center six or seven of the choicest pieces. There was a snake in three coils, fashioned in multicolored gold, its finely chiseled head adorned and made valuable by a topaz and two diamonds, with two sapphires for eyes. I am not ordinarily a lover of black velvet, but the black velvet on which Bansemer's snake lay was most appropriate, and so was the grey velvet which created a provocative quietness beneath certain strikingly harmonious articles of hammered silver. There was a ring with a gem so lovely that you knew it would wear out the hands of equally lovely ladies, growing more and more beautiful in the process until it attained the degree of immortality which is no doubt the exclusive right of jewels. There were necklaces such as no one can put on with impunity, necklaces that wear out their wearers; and finally, on a pale yellow velvet cushion shaped like a simplified neck base, a necklace of infinite lightness. Subtly, playfully woven, a web perpetually broken off. What spider can have secreted gold to catch six small rubies and one large one in this net? Where was the spider sitting, for what was it lurking in wait? Certainly not for more rubies; more likely for someone whose eye would be caught by the ensnared rubies which sat there like modeled blood—in other words: To whom should I, in conformity with my plan or the plan of the gold-secreting spider, give this necklace?

On the eighteenth of January, 1937, on crunching hard-trodden snow, in a night that smelled like more snow, the kind of night that is made to order for one who wishes to hold the snow responsible for anything that may happen, I saw Jan Bronski crossing the street not far from my obser-

there were no more bleeding rubies to tell him, or Parsifal, which way to look.

O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was high time the spirit moved, or it would be all up with Jan, the father. Oskar the son unbuttoned his coat, reached quickly for his drumsticks, and made his drum cry out: Father, father, until Jan Bronski turned and slowly, much too slowly, crossed the street, and found me, Oskar, in the doorway.

How wonderful it was that just as Jan, still frozen in his trance but about to thaw, turned to look at me, snow began to fall. He held out a hand, but not the glove that had touched the rubies, to me and led me silent but undismayed home, where Mama was worrying about me, and Matzerath, not quite seriously but with his usual show of severity, was threatening to call the police. Jan offered no explanation; he did not stay long and was disinclined to play skat, though Matzerath put beer on the table and invited him. In leaving, he caressed Oskar and Oskar was at a loss to know whether it was discretion or friendship he was asking for.

A few days later Bronski gave my mother the necklace. Surely knowing where it came from, she wore it only when Matzerath was absent, either for herself alone or for Jan Bronski, and possibly for me.

Shortly after the war I exchanged it on the black market in Düsseldorf for twelve cartons of Lucky Strikes and a leather briefcase.

that made her lust after sacraments. How easily the routine of sin establishes itself. Ah, those Thursdays: rendezvous in town, deposit little Oskar with Markus, strenuous exercise, usually satisfactory, in Tischlergasse, mocha and pastry at the Café Weitzke, pick up the boy along with a few of Markus' compliments and a package of sewing silk, sold at a price which made it more a present than a purchase, and back again to the Number 5 streetcar. Smiling and far away in her thoughts, my mamma enjoyed the ride past Oliva Gate through Hindenburg-Allee, scarcely noticing the Maiwiese where Matzerath spent his Sunday mornings. She gritted her teeth on the curve round the Sports Palace—how ugly that boxlike structure could be immediately after a beautiful experience!—another curve and there behind dusty trees stood the Conradinum with its red-capped schoolboys—how lovely if little Oskar could have been there in a red cap with a golden C; he would be twelve and a half, in the first year of high school, just starting in on Latin, cutting the figure of a regular little Conradianian, a good student, though perhaps a bit cocky.

After the underpass, as the car moved on toward Reichskolonie and the Helene Lange School, Mrs. Matzerath's thoughts of the Conradinum and her son Oskar's lost opportunities seeped away. Another curve to leftward, past Christ Church with its bulbiform steeple. Then at Max-Halbe-Platz, we would get out, just in front of Kaiser's grocery store. After a glance into the competitor's window, my mama turned into Labesweg, her Calvary: what with her nascent ill humor, this freak of a child, her troubled conscience, and her impatience to begin all over again, my mama, torn between not enough and too much, between aversion and good-natured affection for Matzerath, plodded wearily down Labesweg with me and my drum and her package of dirt-cheap silk thread, toward the store, toward the rolled oats, the kerosene by the herring barrel, the currants, raisins, almonds, and spices, toward Dr. Oetker's Baking Powder, toward Persil Washes White, Maggi and Knorr, Kaffee Hag, Kühne's Vinegar, and four-fruit jam, toward the two strips of flypaper, buzzing in different keys, which hung honeysweet over our counter and had to be changed every other day in the summer, whereas Mama, always with the same honeysweet soul, which summer and winter, all year long, attracted sins buzzing high and buzzing low, repaired each Saturday to the Church of the Sacred Heart,

be identified as Neo-Gothic. Since the brickwork had quickly darkened and the copper covering of the steeple had promptly taken on the traditional verdigris, the differences between medieval and modern brick Gothic were embarrassingly evident only to connoisseurs. Confession was heard in the same way in churches old and new. Just like the Right Reverend Father Wiehnke, a hundred other Right Reverend Fathers sat down in their confessionals on Saturdays after business hours, pressing their hairy sacerdotal ears to the shiny black grating, and the members of the congregation did their best to slip their strings of sins, bead after bead of tawdry sinfulness, through the wire meshes into the priest's ear.

While Mama, by way of Father Wiehnke's auditory canal, was communicating her commissions and omissions, her thoughts, words, and works, to the supreme authorities of the only-saving Church, I, who had nothing to confess, slipped off the wooden bench, which was too smooth for my liking, and stood waiting on the stone floor.

I must admit that the floors of Catholic churches, the smell of a Catholic church, in fact everything about Catholicism still fascinates me in some inexplicable way, just as red-headed girls fascinate me though I should like to change the color of their hair, and that Catholicism never ceases to inspire me with blasphemies which make it perfectly clear that I was irrevocably though to no good purpose baptized a Catholic. Often I surprise myself in the course of the most commonplace acts, while brushing my teeth, for instance, or even while moving my bowels, muttering commentaries on the Mass: In Holy Mass Christ's blood sacrifice is renewed, His blood is shed again for the remission of your sins. The chalice of Christ's blood, the wine is transformed whenever Christ's blood is shed, the true blood of Christ is present, through the vision of his most sacred blood the soul is sprinkled with the blood of Christ, the precious blood, washed in the blood, in the consecration the blood flows, the blood-stained flesh, the voice of Christ's blood rings through all the heavens, the blood of Christ diffuses fragrance before the face of God.

You will admit that I have maintained a certain Catholic tone. There was a time when I couldn't wait for the streetcar without thinking of the Virgin Mary. I called her blessed, full of grace, virgin of virgins, mother of divine grace, Thou blessed among women. Thou who are worthy of all venera-

tion, Thou who hast borne the . . . , mother most amiable, mother inviolate, virgin most renowned, let me savor the sweetness of the name of Jesus as Thou savoredst it in thy heart, for it is just and meet, right and for our salvation, Queen of Heaven, thrice-blessed . . .

Sometimes, and especially on those Saturdays when Mama and I went to the Church of the Sacred Heart, that little word "blessed" was so poisonously sweet in my heart that I thanked Satan for living through my baptism within me, for providing me with an antidote which enabled me to stride, blaspheming like a Catholic but still erect, over the flagstones of Sacred Heart.

Jesus, after whose heart the church was named, was manifested not only in the sacraments and in the bright-colored little pictures of the Calvary; there were also three colored sculptures showing him in different poses.

One was of painted plaster. He stood there, long-haired, on a golden pedestal in a Prussian blue robe and sandals. He opened his robe over his chest and, in defiance of all physiology, disclosed in the middle of his thorax a tomato-red, glorified, and stylized bleeding heart, so enabling the church to be named after this organ.

The very first time I examined this open-hearted Jesus, I couldn't help noticing an embarrassing resemblance between the Saviour and my godfather, uncle, and presumptive father Jan Bronski. The same dreamy blue eyes full of naive self-confidence. That blossoming rosebud mouth, always on the point of tears. The manly suffering in the line of the eyebrows. The full sanguine cheeks demanding to be chastised. Both had that face which men feel rather inclined to punch in the nose but which wrings caresses from women. And then there were the tired effeminate hands, well manicured and averse to manual labor, with their stigmata displayed like the prize pieces of a court jeweler. I was deeply troubled by those Bronski eyes, those eyes that misunderstood me like a father, which had been painted into Jesus' face. For my own eyes had that same blue look which can arouse enthusiasm but not convince.

Oskar turned away from the bleeding heart in the nave, hastened from the first station of the Cross, where Jesus takes up the Cross, to the seventh station where he falls for the second time beneath its weight, and on to the high altar over which hung the second sculptured image of Jesus. Perhaps he was tired or perhaps he was just trying to

concentrate—in any case, this Jesus had his eyes closed. What muscles the man had! At the sight of this decathlon-winner I forgot all about Sacred-Heart Bronski. There I stood, as often as Mama confessed to Father Wiehnke, gazing devoutly at the athlete over the high altar. You can believe me that I prayed. Athlete most amiable, I called him, athlete of athletes, world's champion hanger on the Cross by regulation nails. And never a twitch or a quiver. The perpetual light quivered, but he displayed perfect discipline and took the highest possible number of points. The stop watches ticked. His time was computed. In the sacristy the sexton's none-too-clean fingers were already polishing his gold medal. But Jesus didn't compete for the sake of honors. Faith came to me. I knelt down as best I could, made the sign of the cross on my drum, and tried to associate words like "blessed" or "afflicted" with Jesse Owens and Rudolf Harbig and last year's Olympic Games in Berlin; but I was not always successful, for I had to admit that Jesus had not played fair with the two thieves. Forced to disqualify him, I turned my head to the left, where, taking new hope, I saw the third statue of the divine athlete in the interior of the church.

"Let me not pray until I have seen thrice," I stammered, then set my feet down on the flags and followed the checker-board pattern to the left-side altar. At every step I had the feeling: he is looking after you, the saints are looking after you, Peter; whom they nailed to a cross with his head down, Andrew whom they nailed to a slanting cross—hence the St. Andrew's cross. There is also a Greek cross, not to mention the Latin, or Passion, cross. Double crosses, Teutonic crosses, and Calvary crosses are reproduced on textiles, in books and pictures. I have seen the patty cross, the anchor cross, and the cloverleaf cross overlapping in relief. The Moline cross is handsome, the Maltese cross is coveted, the hooked cross, or swastika, is forbidden, while de Gaulle's cross, the cross of Lorraine, is called the cross of St. Anthony in naval battles. This same cross of St. Anthony is worn on a chain, the thieves' cross is ugly, the Pope's cross is papal, and the Russian cross is also known as the cross of Lazarus. In addition there is the Red Cross. And the anti-alcoholic Blue Cross. Yellow cross is poison, cross spiders eat one another. At the crossroads you crossed me up, crisscross, cross-examination, cross purposes, crossword puzzles. And so I turned round, leaving the Cross behind me; turned back

on the crucified athlete, and approached the child Jesus who was propped up on the Virgin Mary's right thigh.

Oskar stood by the left side-altar of the left aisle of the nave. Mary had the expression that his mama must have worn when as a seventeen-year-old shopgirl in Troyl she had no money for the movies, but made up for it by gazing spellbound at posters of Asta Nielsen.

She took no interest in Jesus but was looking at the other boy on her right knee, whom, to avert misunderstandings, I shall identify at once as John the Baptist. Both boys were my size. Actually Jesus seemed perhaps an inch taller, though according to the texts he was even younger than the little Baptist. It had amused the sculptor to make the three-year-old Saviour pink and naked. John, because he would later go out into the desert, was wearing a shaggy, chocolate-colored pelt, which covered half his chest, his belly, and his watering can.

Oskar would have done better to stay by the high altar or to mind his business in the vicinity of the confessional than to venture into the company of these two boys with that precocious look in their eyes which bore a terrifying resemblance to his own. Naturally they had blue eyes and his chestnut-brown hair. The likeness would have been complete if only the barber-sculptor had given his two little Oskars a crew cut and chopped off those preposterous corkscrew curls.

I shall not dwell too long on the boy Baptist, who pointed his left forefinger at Jesus as though counting off to see who should play first: "Eeny meeny miny mo . . ." Ignoring such childish pastimes, I take a good look at Jesus and recognize my spit and image. He might have been my twin brother. He had my stature and exactly my watering can, in those days employed exclusively as a watering can. He looked out into the world with my cobalt blue Bronski eyes and—this was what I resented most—he had my very own gestures.

My double raised both arms and clenched his fists in such a way that one wanted desperately to thrust something into them, my drumsticks for example. If the sculptor had done that and put a red and white plaster drum on his pink little thighs, it would have been I, Oskar's very own self, who sat there on the Virgin's knee, drumming the congregation together. There are things in this world which—sacred as they may be—cannot be left as they are.

Three carpeted steps led up to the Virgin clad in green

and silver, to John's shaggy, chocolate-colored pelt, and to the boy Jesus whose coloring suggested boiled ham. In front of them there was an altar outfitted with anemic candles and flowers at all prices. All three of them—the green Virgin, the brown John, and the pink Jesus—had halos the size of dinnerplates stuck to the backs of their heads—expensive plates adorned with gold leaf.

3If not for the steps before the altar, I should never have climbed up. Steps, door handles, and shopwindows had a power of seduction for Oskar in those days, and though today he has no need of anything but his hospital bed, they still do not leave him indifferent. He let himself be seduced from one step to the next, though always on the same carpet. He came close enough to tap the group, at once disparagingly and respectfully with his knuckles. He was able to scratch it with his fingernails in the way that discloses the plaster under the paint. The folds in the Virgin's drapery could be followed along their devious course to the toes resting on the cloud bank. A succinct intimation of the Virgin's shin suggested that the sculptor had first created flesh and then submerged it in draperies. When Oskar felt the boy Jesus' watering can, which should have been circumcised but wasn't, when he stroked it and cautiously pressed it as though to move it, he felt a pleasant but strangely new and disturbing sensation in his own watering can, whereupon he left Jesus' alone in the hope that Jesus would let him alone.

Circumcised or uncircumcised, I let matters rest there, pulled out my drum from under my sweater, removed it from my neck, and, taking care not to nick Jesus' halo, hung the drum round his neck. In view of my size, this took a bit of doing. I had to climb up on the sculpture and stand on the cloud bank that served as a pedestal.

This did not happen in January, '36, on Oskar's first visit to church after baptism, but during Holy Week of the same year. All that winter his mama had been hard put to it to keep abreast of her dealings with Jan Bronski in the confessional. Consequently Oskar had plenty of Saturdays in which to mature his plan, to reject, justify, and revise it, to examine it from all sides, and finally, with the help of the stations of the Cross on the Monday of Holy Week, to discard all previous variants, formulate a new one, and carry it out with the utmost simplicity and directness.

Since Mama felt the need to confess before the Easter to-

by Him, true Son of true Father, consubstantial with Him, through Him, who for us men and our salvation, descended from Heaven, became incarnate, was made man, was buried, rose again, sitteth at the hand of the Father, the dead, no end, I believe in, together with the Father, spoke by, believe in the one Holy, Catholic, and . . .

Well, my Catholicism survived only in my nostrils. My faith was just about washed up. But it wasn't the smell I was interested in. I wanted something else: I wanted to hear my drum, I wanted Jesus to play something for my benefit, I wanted a modest little miracle. I wasn't asking for thunder that would send Vicar Rasczeia running to the spot and Father Wiehnke painfully dragging his fat to witness the miracle; I wasn't asking for a major miracle that would demand reports to the Diocese at Oliva and impel the bishop to submit a testimonial to the Vatican. No, I was not ambitious. Oskar had no desire to be canonized. All he wanted was a little private miracle, something he could hear and see, something that would make it clear to him once and for all whether he should drum for or against; all he wanted was a sign to tell him which of the two blue-eyed identical twins was entitled and would be entitled in future to call himself Jesus.

I sat and waited. I also began to worry: Mama must be in the confessional; by now she must have the sixth commandment behind her. The old man who is always limping about churches limped past the main altar and then past the left side-altar, saluting the Virgin with the boys. Perhaps he saw the drum but without understanding. He shuffled on, growing older in the process.

Time passed, but Jesus did not beat the drum. I heard voices from the choir. If only no one starts playing the organ, I thought anxiously. If they start practicing for Easter, the organ will drown out the first feeble, hesitant drumbeats.

But no one touched the organ. Nor did Jesus drum. There was no miracle. I rose from my cushion with a cracking in my knee joints. Desolate and morose, I moved over the carpet, pulled myself up from step to step, but neglected all the gradual prayers I knew. I climbed up on the plaster cloud, upsetting some medium-priced flowers. All I wanted was to get my drum back from that preposterous naked kid.

I admit it and I always will: it was a mistake to try to teach him anything. I can't imagine what gave me the idea. Be that as it may, I took the sticks but left the drum.

Softly at first, but then with the impatience of an impatient teacher, I showed little pseudo-Jesus how to do it. And finally, putting the drumsticks back into his hands, I gave him his chance to show what he had learned from Oskar.

Before I had time to wrench drum and drumsticks away from this most obstinate of all pupils without concern for his halo, Father Wiehnke was behind me—my drumming had made itself heard throughout the length and breadth of the church—Vicar Rasczeia was behind me, Mama was behind me, the old man was behind me. The Vicar pulled me down, Father Wiehnke cuffed me, Mama wept at me, Father Wiehnke whispered at me, the Vicar genuflected and bobbed up and took the drumsticks away from Jesus, genuflected again with the drumsticks and bobbed up again for the drum, took the drum away from Little Lord Jesus, cracked his halo, jostled his watering can, broke off a bit of cloud, tumbled down the steps, and genuflected once more. He didn't want to give me the drum and that made me angrier than I was before, compelling me to kick Father Wiehnke and shame my mama, who indeed had plenty to be ashamed about by the time I had finished kicking, hitting, and scratching and torn myself free from Father Wiehnke, the Vicar, the old man, and Mama. Thereupon I ran out in front of the high altar with Satan hopping up and down in me, whispering as he had at my baptism: "Oskar, look around. Windows everywhere. All glass, all glass."

And past the Athlete on the Cross, who kept his peace and did not so much as twitch a muscle, I sang at the three high windows of the apse, red, yellow and green on a blue ground, representing the twelve apostles. But I aimed neither at Mark nor Matthew. I aimed at the dove above them, which stood on its head celebrating the Pentecost; I aimed at the Holy Ghost. My vocal chords vibrated, I battled the bird with my diamond. Was it my fault? Was it the dauntless Athlete who intervened? Was that the miracle, unknown to all? They saw me trembling and silently pouring out my powers against the apse, and all save Mama thought I was praying, though I was praying for nothing but broken glass. But Oskar failed, his time had not yet come. I sank down on the flagstones and wept bitterly because Jesus had failed, because Oskar had failed, because Wiehnke and Rasczeia misunderstood me, and were already spouting absurdities about repentance. Only Mama did not fail. She understood

my tears, though she couldn't help feeling glad that there had been no broken glass.

Then Mama picked me up in her arms, recovered the drum and drumsticks from the Vicar, and promised Father Wiehnke to pay for the damage, whereupon he accorded her a belated absolution, for I had interrupted her confession: even Oskar got a little of the blessing, though I could have done without it.

While Mama was carrying me out of the Sacred Heart, I counted on my fingers: Today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday, then Wednesday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and then it will be all up with that character who can't even drum, who won't even give me the pleasure of a little broken glass, who resembles me but is false. He will go down into the grave while I shall keep on drumming and drumming, but never again experience any desire for a miracle.

Good Friday Fare

PARADOXICAL: THAT MIGHT be the word for my feelings between Passion Monday and Good Friday. On the one hand I was irritated over that plaster boy Jesus who wouldn't drum; on the other, I was pleased that the drum was now all my own. Though on the one hand my voice failed in its assault on the church windows, on the other hand that intact multicolored glass preserved in Oskar the vestige of Catholic faith which was yet to inspire any number of desperate blasphemies.

And there was more to the paradox than that: On the one hand I managed to sing an attic window to pieces on my way home from the Church of the Sacred Heart just to see if it was still within my powers, but from that time on, on the other hand, the triumph of my voice over profane targets made me painfully aware of my failures in the sacred sector. Paradox, I have said. The cleavage was lasting; I have never been able to heal it, and it is still with me today, though today I am at home neither in the sacred nor the profane but dwell on the fringes, in a mental hospital.

Mama paid for the damage to the left side-altar. Business was good at Easter although the shop, on the insistence of Matzerath, who was a Protestant, had to be closed on Good Friday. Mama, who usually had her way, gave in on Good Fridays and closed up, demanding in return the right to close on Catholic grounds for Corpus Christi, to replace the gingerbread in the window by a gingerbread Virgin with electric lights and to march in the procession at Oliva.

We had a cardboard sign with "Closed for Good Friday" on one side and "Closed for Corpus Christi" on the other. On the Good Friday following that drumless and voiceless Monday of Holy Week, Matzerath hung out the sign saying "Closed for Good Friday", and immediately after breakfast we started for Brösen on the streetcar. To run our word into the ground, the scene in Labesweg was also paradoxical. The Protestants went to church, the Catholics washed windows and beat everything vaguely resembling a carpet so vigorously and

resoundingly in the courtyards that one had the impression thousands of Saviours were being nailed to thousands of Crosses all at once.

Our Holy Family however—Mama, Matzerath, Jan Bronski, and Oskar—left the Passiontide carpet-beating behind us, settled ourselves in the Number 9 streetcar, and rode down Brösener-Weg, past the airfield, the old drill ground and the new drill ground, and waited on a siding near Saspe Cemetery for the car coming in the opposite direction, from Neufahrwasser-Brösen, to pass. Mama took the wait as an occasion for gloomy, though lightly uttered observations. The abandoned little graveyard with its slanting overgrown tombstones and stunted scrub pines was pretty, romantic, enchanting, she thought.

"I'd be glad to lie there if it was still operating," she said with enthusiasm. But Matzerath thought the soil was too sandy, found fault with the thistles and wild oats. Jan Bronski suggested that the noise from the airfield and the nearby streetcar switches might disturb the tranquility of an otherwise idyllic spot.

The car coming from Neufahrwasser-Brösen passed round us, the conductor rang twice, and we rode on, leaving Saspe and its cemetery behind us, toward Brösen, a beach resort which at that time, toward the end of April, looked mighty dismal: the refreshment stands boarded over, the casino shut tight, the seaside walk bereft of flags, long lines of empty bathhouses. On the weather table there were still chalk marks from the previous year: Air: 65; water: 60; wind: northeast; prospects: clear to cloudy.

At first we all decided to walk to Gletkau, but then, though nothing was said, we took the opposite direction to the breakwater. Broad and lazy, the Baltic lapped at the beach. As far as the harbor mouth, from the white lighthouse to the beacon light on the breakwater, not a soul to be seen. A recent rainfall had imprinted its regular pattern on the sand; it was fun to break it up with our footprints; Mama and I had taken off our shoes and stockings. Matzerath picked up smooth little disks of brick the size of gulden pieces and skipped them eagerly, ambitiously over the greenish water. Less skillful, Jan Bronski looked for amber between his attempts to skip stones, and actually found a few splinters and a nugget the size of a cherry pit, which he gave Mama, who kept looking back, as though in love with her footprints. The sun shone cautiously. The day was cool, still and clear;

on the horizon you could make out a stripe that meant the Hela Peninsula and two or three vanishing smoke trails; from time to time the superstructure of a merchant ship would bob up over the horizon.

In dispersed order we reached the first granite boulders of the breakwater. Mama and I put our shoes and stockings back on. Matzerath and Jan started off into the open sea, hopping from stone to stone, while she was still helping me to lace my shoes. Scraggly clumps of seaweed grew from the interstices at the base of the wall. Oskar would have liked to comb them. But Mama took me by the hand and we followed the men, who were gamboling like schoolboys. At every step my drum beat against my knee; even here, I wouldn't let them take it away from me. Mama had on a light-blue spring coat with raspberry-colored facings. She had difficulty in negotiating the granite boulders in her high-heeled shoes. As always on Sundays and holidays, I was wearing my sailor coat with the gold anchor buttons. The band on my sailor hat came from Gretchen Scheffler's grab bag; S.M.S. *Seydlitz*, it said, and it would have fluttered if there had been any breeze. Matzerath unbuttoned his brown overcoat. Jan, always the soul of fashion, sported an ulster with a resplendent velvet collar.

We hopped and hobbled as far as the beacon at the end of the breakwater. At the base of the little tower sat an elderly man in a longshoreman's cap and a quilted jacket. Beside him there was a potato sack with something wriggling and writhing in it. The man—I figured he must be from Brösen or Neufahrwasser—was holding one end of a clothesline. The other end, caked with seaweed, vanished in the brackish Mottlau water which, still unmixed with the clear open sea, splashed against the stones of the breakwater.

We were all curious to know why the man in the longshoreman's cap was fishing with a common clothesline and obviously without a float. Mama asked him in tones of good-natured mockery, calling him "Uncle". Uncle grinned, showing tobacco-stained stumps; offering no explanation, he spat out a long, viscous train of tobacco juice which landed in the sludge amid the granite boulders, coated with tar and oil, at the base of the sea wall. There his spittle bobbed up and down so long that a gull circled down and, deftly avoiding the boulders, caught it up and flew off, drawing other screaming gulls in its wake.

We were soon ready to go, for it was cold out there and

the sun was no help, but just then the man in the longshoreman's cap began to pull in his line hand over hand. Mama still wanted to leave. But Matzerath couldn't be moved, and Jan, who as a rule acceded to Mama's every wish, gave her no support on this occasion. Oskar didn't care whether we stayed or went. But as long as we were staying, he watched. While the longshoreman, pulling evenly hand over hand and stripping off seaweed at every stroke, gathered the line between his legs, I noted that the merchantman which only half an hour before had barely shown its superstructure above the horizon, had changed its course; lying low in the water, she was heading for the harbor. Must be a Swede carrying iron ore to draw that much water, Oskar reflected.

I turned away from the Swede when the longshoreman slowly stood up. "Well, s'pose we take a look." His words were addressed to Matzerath, who had no idea what it was all about but nodded knowingly. "S'pose we take a look," the longshoreman said over and over as he continued to haul in the line, now with increasing effort. He clambered down the stones toward the end of the line and stretched out both arms into the foaming pond between the granite blocks, clutched something—Mama turned away but not soon enough—he clutched something, changed his hold, tugged and heaved, shouted at them to make way, and flung something heavy and dripping, a great living lump of something down in our midst: it was a horse's head, a fresh and genuine horse's head, the head of a black horse with a black mane, which only yesterday or the day before had no doubt been neighing; for the head was not putrid, it didn't stink, or if it did, then only of Mottlau water; but everything on the breakwater stank of that.

The man in the longshoreman's cap—which had slipped down over the back of his neck—stood firmly planted over the lump of horsemeat, from which small light-green eels were darting furiously. The man had trouble in catching them, for eels move quickly and deftly, especially over smooth wet stones. Already the gulls were screaming overhead. They wheeled down, three or four of them would seize a small or medium-sized eel, and they refused to be driven away, for the breakwater was their domain. Nevertheless the longshoreman, thrashing and snatching among the gulls, managed to cram a couple of dozen small eels into the sack which Matzerath, who liked to be helpful, held ready for him. Matzerath was too busy to see Mama turn

green and support first her hand, then her head, on Jan's shoulder and velvet collar.

But when the small and medium-sized eels were in the sack and the longshoreman, whose cap had fallen off in the course of his work, began to squeeze thicker, dark-colored eels out of the cadaver, Mama had to sit down. Jan tried to turn her head away but Mama would not allow it; she kept staring with great cow's eyes into the very middle of the longshoreman's activity.

"Take a look," he groaned intermittently. And "S'pose we!" With the help of his rubber boot he wrenched the horse's mouth open and forced a club between the jaws, so that the great yellow horse teeth seemed to be laughing. And when the longshoreman—only now did I see that he was bald as an egg—reached both hands into the horse's gullet and pulled out two at once, both of them as thick and long as a man's arm, my mother's jaws were also torn asunder: she disgorged her whole breakfast, pouring out lumpy egg white and threads of egg yolk mingled with lumps of bread soaked in *café au lait* over the stones of the breakwater. After that she retched but there was nothing more to come out, for that was all she had had for breakfast, because she was overweight and wanted to reduce at any price and tried all sorts of diets which, however, she seldom stuck to. She ate in secret. She was conscientious only about her Tuesday gymnastics at the Women's Association, but on this score she stood firm as a rock though Jan and even Matzerath laughed at her when, carrying her togs in a drawstring bag, she went out to join those comical old biddies, to swing Indian clubs in a shiny blue gym suit, and still failed to reduce.

Even now Mama couldn't have vomited up more than half a pound and retch as she might, that was all the weight she succeeded in taking off. Nothing came but greenish mucus, but the gulls came. They were already on their way when she began to vomit, they circled lower, they dropped down sleek and smooth; untroubled by any fear of growing fat, they fought over my mama's breakfast, and were not to be driven away—and who was there to drive them away in view of the fact that Jan Bronski was afraid of gulls and shielded his beautiful blue eyes with his hands.

Nor would they pay attention to Oskar, not even when he enlisted his drum against them, not even when he tried to fight off their whiteness with a roll of his drumsticks on white lacquer. His drumming was no help; if anything it made

the gulls whiter than ever. As for Matzerath, he was not in the least concerned over Mama. He laughed and aped the longshoreman; ho-ho, steady nerves, that was him. The longshoreman was almost finished. When in conclusion he extracted an enormous eel from the horse's ear, followed by a mess of white porridge from the horse's brain, Matzerath himself was green about the gills but went right on with his act. He bought two large and two medium-sized eels from the longshoreman for a song and tried to bargain even after he had paid up.

My heart was full of praise for Jan Bronski. He looked as if he were going to cry and nevertheless he helped my mama to her feet, threw one arm round her waist, and led her away, steering with his other arm, which he held out in front of her. It was pretty comical to see her hobbling from stone to stone in her high-heeled shoes. Her knees buckled under her at every step, but somehow she managed to reach the shore without spraining an ankle.

Oskar remained with Matzerath and the longshoreman. The longshoreman, who had put his cap on again, had begun to explain why the potato sack was full of rock salt. There was salt in the sack so the eels would wriggle themselves to death in the salt and the salt would draw the slime from their skin and innards. For when eels are in salt, they can't help wriggling and they wriggle until they are dead, leaving their slime in the salt. That's what you do if you want to smoke the eels afterward. It's forbidden by the police and the SPCA but that changes nothing. How else are you going to get the slime out of your eels? Afterward the dead eels are carefully rubbed off with dry peat moss and hung up in a smoking barrel over beechwood to smoke.

Matzerath thought it was only fair to let the eels wriggle in salt. They crawl into the horse's head, don't they? And into human corpses, too, said the longshoreman. They say the eels were mighty fat after the Battle of the Skagerrak. And a few days ago one of the doctors here in the hospital told me about a married woman who tried to take her pleasure with a live eel. But the eel bit into her and wouldn't let go; she had to be taken to the hospital and after that they say she couldn't have any more babies.

The longshoreman, however, tied up the sack with the salted eels and tossed it nimbly over his shoulder. He hung the coiled clothesline round his neck and, as the merchantman put into port, plodded off in the direction of Neufahr-

GÜNTER GRASS

er. The ship was about eighteen hundred tons and wasn't
wede but a Finn, carrying not iron ore but timber. The
shoreman with the sack seemed to have friends on board,
he waved across at the rusty hull and shouted something.
a board the Finn they waved back and also shouted some-
ing. But it was a mystery to me why Matzerath waved
o and shouted "Ship ahoy!" or some such nonsense. As a
ative of the Rhineland he knew nothing about ships and
ere was certainly not one single Finn among his acquaint-
ances. But that was the way he was; he always had to wave
when other people were waving, to shout, laugh, and clap
when other people were shouting, laughing, and clapping.
That explains why he joined the Party at a relatively early
date, when it was quite unnecessary, brought no benefits,
and just wasted his Sunday mornings.

Oskar walked along slowly behind Matzerath, the man
from Neufahrwasser, and the overloaded Finn. Now and then
I turned around, for the longshoreman had abandoned the
horse's head at the foot of the beacon. Of the head there
was nothing to be seen, the gulls had covered it over. A
glittering white hole in the bottle-green sea, a freshly washed
cloud that might rise neatly into the air at any moment,
veiling with its cries this horse's head that screamed instead
of whinnying.

When I had had enough, I ran away from the gulls and
Matzerath, beating my fist on my drum as I ran, passed the
longshoreman, who was now smoking a short-stemmed pipe,
and reached Mama and Jan Bronski at the shore end of the
breakwater. Jan was still holding Mama as before, but now
one hand had disappeared under her coat collar. Matzerath
could not see this, however, nor could he see that Mama had
one hand in Jan's trouser pocket, for he was still far
behind us, wrapping the four eels, which the longshoreman
had knocked unconscious with a stone, in a piece of new
paper he had found between the stones of the breakwater.
When Matzerath caught up with us, he swung his bundle
eels and boasted: "He wanted one fifty. But I gave him
gulden and that was that."

Mama was looking better and both her hands were vis-
again. "I hope you don't expect me to eat your eel," she
"I'll never touch fish again as long as I live and certainly
an eel."

Matzerath laughed: "Don't carry on so, pus-
You've always known how they catch eels and you've a

eaten them just the same. Even fresh ones. We'll see how you feel about it when your humble servant does them up with all the trimmings and a little salad on the side."

Jan Bronski, who had withdrawn his hand from Mama's coat in plenty of time, said nothing. I drummed all the way to Brösen so they wouldn't start in again about eels. At the streetcar stop and in the car I went right on drumming to prevent the three grownups from talking. The eels kept relatively quiet. The car didn't stop in Saspe because the other car was already there. A little after the airfield Matzerath, despite my drumming, began to tell us how hungry he was. Mama did not react, she looked past us and through us until Jan offered her one of his Regattas. While he was giving her a light and she was adjusting the gold tip to her lips, she smiled at Matzerath, for she knew he didn't like her to smoke in public.

At Max-Halbe-Platz we got out, and in spite of everything Mama took Matzerath's arm and not Jan's as I had expected. While Matzerath was opening up the apartment, Mrs. Kater, who lived on the fourth floor next door to Meyn the trumpeter, passed us on the stairs. A rolled brownish carpet was slung over her shoulder, and she was supporting it with her upraised arms, enormous and meat-red. Her armpits displayed flaming bundles of blond hair, knotted and caked with sweat. The carpet hung down in front of her and behind her. She might just as well have been carrying a drunken man over her shoulder, but her husband was no longer alive. As this mass of fat moved past us in a shiny black house smock, her effluvia struck me: ammonia, pickles, carbide—she must have had the monthlies.

Shortly thereafter the rhythmic reports of carpet-beating rose from the yard. It drove me through the apartment, it pursued me, until at last I escaped into our bedroom clothes cupboard where the worst of the pre-paschal uproar was damped out by the winter overcoats.

But it wasn't just Mrs. Kater and her carpet-beating that sent me scurrying to the clothes cupboard. Before Mama, Jan, and Matzerath had even taken their coats off, they began to argue about the Good Friday dinner. But they didn't stick to eels. As usual when they needed something to argue about, they remembered me and my famous fall from the cellar stairs: "You're to blame, it's all your fault, now I am going to make that eel soup, don't be so squeamish, make anything you like but not eels, there's plenty of canned goods

in drawing the mirror doors to and in jamming them closed with a shawl that I found on the cupboard floor, in such a way that a finger's-breadth opening let in a certain amount of air and enabled me to look out in case of emergency. I laid my drum on my knees but drummed nothing, not even ever so softly; I just sat there in utter passivity, letting myself be enveloped and penetrated by the vapors arising from winter overcoats.

How wonderful that this cupboard should be there with its heavy, scarcely breathing woollens which enabled me to gather together nearly all my thoughts, to tie them into a bundle and give them away to a dream princess who was rich enough to accept my gift with a dignified, scarcely perceptible pleasure.

As usual when I concentrated and took advantage of my psychic gift, I transported myself to the office of Dr. Hollatz in Brunshöfer-Weg and savored the one part of my regular Wednesday visits that I cared about. My thoughts were concerned far less with the doctor, whose examinations were becoming more and more finicky, than with Sister Inge, his assistant. She alone was permitted to undress me and dress me; she alone was allowed to measure and weigh me and administer the various tests; in short, it was Sister Inge who conscientiously though rather grumpily carried out all the experiments to which Dr. Hollatz subjected me. Each time Sister Inge, not without a certain irony, reported failure which Hollatz metamorphosed into "partial success." I seldom looked at Sister Inge's face. My eyes and my sometimes racing drummer's heart rested on the clean starched whiteness of her nurse's uniform, on the weightless construction that she wore as a cap, on a simple brooch adorned with a Red Cross. How pleasant it was to follow the folds, forever fresh, of her uniform! Had she a body under it? Her steadily aging face and rawboned though well-kept hands suggested that Sister Inge was a woman after all. To be sure, there was no such womanish smell as my mama gave off when Jan, or even Matzerath, uncovered her before my eyes. She smelled of soap and drowsy medicines. How often I was overcome by sleep as she auscultated my small, supposedly sick body: a light sleep born of the folds of white fabrics, a sleep shrouded in carbolic acid, a dreamless sleep except that sometimes in the distance her brooch expanded into heaven knows what: a sea of banners, the Alpine glow, a field of poppies, ready to revolt, against whom, Lord knows: against

getting at. What, after all, could she be screaming about but eels, leading up, as everything led up once my mama started screaming, to my fall down the cellar stairs. Matzerath answered back. They knew their parts. Jan intervened. Without him there could have been no show. Act Two: bang, that was the piano lid being thrown back; without notes, by heart, the three of them all at once but not together howled out the "Huntsmen's Chorus" from *Freischütz*: "What thing on earth resembles . . ." And in the midst of the uproar, bang shut went the piano lid, bang went the overturned piano stool, and there was Mama coming into the bedroom. A quick glance in the mirror of my mirror doors, and she flung herself, I could see it all through the cleft, on the marriage bed beneath the blue canopy and wrung her hands with as many fingers as the repentant gold-framed Mary Magdalene in the color print at the head end of the matrimonial fortress.

For a long time all I could hear was Mama's whimpering, the soft creaking of the bed, and faint murmurs from the living room. Jan was pacifying Matzerath. Then Matzerath asked Jan to go and pacify Mama. The murmuring thinned down, Jan entered the bedroom. Act Three: He stood by the bed, looking back and forth between Mama and the repentant Mary Magdalene, sat down cautiously on the edge of the bed, stroked Mama's back and rear end—she was lying face down—spoke to her soothingly in Kashubian—and finally, when words were no help, inserted his hand beneath her skirt until she stopped whimpering and he was able to remove his eyes from the many-fingered Mary Magdalene. It was a scene worth seeing. His work done, Jan arose, dabbed his fingers with his handkerchief, and finally addressed Mama loudly, no longer speaking Kashubian and stressing every word for the benefit of Matzerath in the kitchen or living room: "Now come along, Agnes. Let's forget the whole business. Alfred dumped the eels in the toilet long ago. Now we'll play a nice game of skat, for a quarter of a pfennig if you like, and once we've all forgotten and made up, Alfred will make us mushrooms with scrambled eggs and fried potatoes."

To this Mama said nothing, stood up from the bed, smoothed out the yellow bedspread, tossed her hair into shape in front of my mirror doors, and left the bedroom behind Jan. I removed my eye from the slit and soon heard them shuffling cards. I think Jan was bidding against Matzerath, who passed at twenty-three. Whereupon Mama bid Jan up to

thirty-six; at this point he backed down, and Mama played a grand which she just barely lost. Next Jan bid diamond single and won hands down, and Mama won the third game, a heart hand without two, though it was close.

Certain that this family skat game, briefly interrupted by scrambled eggs, mushrooms, and fried potatoes, would go on far into the night, I scarcely listened to the hands that followed, but tried to find my way back to Sister Inge and her white, sleepy-making uniforms. But I was not to find the happiness I sought in Dr. Hollatz' office. Not only did green, blue, yellow, and black persist in breaking into the redness of the Red Cross pin, but the events of the morning kept crowding in as well: whenever the door leading to the consultation room and Sister Inge opened, it was not the pure and airy vision of the nurse's uniform that presented itself to my eyes, but the longshoreman at the foot of the beacon on the Neufahrwasser breakwater, pulling eels from the dripping, crawling horse's head, and what set itself up to be white, so that I tried to connect it with Sister Inge, was the gulls' wings which for barely a moment covered the horse's head and the eels in it, until the wound broke open again but did not bleed red, but was black like the black horse, and bottle-green the sea, while the Finnish timber ship contributed a bit of rust color to the picture and the gulls—don't talk to me of doves—descended like a cloud on the sacrifice, dipped in their wingtips and tossed the eel to Sister Inge, who caught it, celebrated it, and turned into a gull, not a dove, but in any case into the Holy Ghost, let it take the form of a gull, descending cloudlike upon the flesh to feast the Pentecost.

Giving up the struggle, I left the cupboard. Angrily pushing the doors open, I stepped out and found myself unchanged in front of the mirrors, but even so I was glad Mrs. Kater had stopped beating carpets. Good Friday was over for Oskar, but it was only after Easter that his Passion began.

Tapered at the Foot End

AND MAMA'S AS well. On Easter Sunday we went with the Bronskis to visit Grandma and Uncle Vincent in Bissau. It was after that that her sufferings began—sufferings that the smiling spring weather was powerless to attenuate.

It is not true that Matzerath forced Mama to start eating fish again. Quite of her own accord, possessed by some mysterious demon, she began, exactly two weeks after Easter, to devour fish in such quantities, without regard for her figure, that Matzerath said: "For the Lord's sake stop eating so much fish like somebody was making you."

She started in at breakfast on canned sardines, two hours later, unless there happened to be customers in the shop, she would dig into a case of Bohnsack sprats, for lunch she would demand fried flounder or codfish with mustard sauce, and in the afternoon there she was again with her can opener: eels in jelly, rollmops, baked herring, and if Matzerath refused to fry or boil more fish for supper, she would waste no breath in arguing, but would quietly leave the table and come back from the shop with a chunk of smoked eel. For the rest of us it was the end of our appetites, because she would scrape the last particle of fat from the inside and outside of the eel's skin with a knife, and in general she took to eating her fish with a knife. She would have to vomit at intervals throughout the day. Helplessly anxious, Matzerath would ask: "Maybe you're pregnant, or what's the matter with you?"

"Don't talk nonsense," said Mama if she said anything at all. One Sunday when green eels with new potatoes swimming in cream sauce were set on the table, Grandma Koljaiczek smacked the table with the flat of her hand and cried out: "What's the matter, Agnes? Tell us what's the matter? Why do you eat fish when it don't agree with you and you don't say why and you act like a lunatic?" Mama only shook her head, pushed the potatoes aside, pulled out an eel through the sauce, and set to with relentless determination. Jan Bron-

ski said nothing. Once when I surprised the two of them on the couch, they were holding hands as usual and their clothing was normally disarranged, but I was struck by Jan's tear-stained eyes and by Mama's apathy, which, however, suddenly shifted into its opposite. She jumped up, clutched me, lifted me up and squeezed me, revealing an abyss of emptiness which apparently nothing could fill but enormous quantities of fried, boiled, preserved, and smoked fish.

A few days later I saw her in the kitchen as she not only fell upon the usual accursed sardines, but poured out the oil from several cans she had been saving up into a little saucepan, heated it over the gas, and drank it down. Standing in the doorway, I was so upset that I dropped my drum.

That same evening Mama was taken to the City Hospital. Matzerath wept and lamented as we were waiting for the ambulance: "Why don't you want the child? What does it matter whose it is? Or is it still on account of that damn fool horse's head? If only we'd never gone out there. Can't you forget it, Agnes? I didn't do it on purpose."

The ambulance came, Mama was carried out. Children and grownups gathered on the sidewalk; they drove her away and it soon turned out that Mama had forgotten neither the breakwater nor the horse's head, that she had carried the memory of that horse—regardless of whether his name was Hans or Fritz—along with her. Every organ in her body stored up the bitter memory of that Good Friday excursion and for fear that it be repeated, her organs saw to it that my mama, who was quite in agreement with them, should die.

Dr. Hollatz spoke of jaundice and fish poisoning. In the hospital they found Mama to be in her third month of pregnancy and gave her a private room. For four days she showed those of us who were allowed to visit her a face devastated by pain and nausea; sometimes she smiled at me through her nausea.

Although she tried hard to make her visitors happy, just as today I do my best to seem pleased when visitors come, she could not prevent a periodic retching from seizing hold of her slowly wasting body, though there was nothing more to come out of it except, at last, on the fourth day of that strenuous dying, the bit of breath which each of us must give up if he is to be honored with a death certificate.

We all sighed with relief when there was nothing more within her to provoke that retching which so marred her beauty. Once she had been washed and lay there in her

shroud, she had her familiar, round, shrewdly naïve face again. The head nurse closed Mama's eyes because Matzerath and Bronski were blind with tears.

I could not weep, because the others, the men and Grandma, Hedwig Bronski and the fourteen-year-old Stephan, were all weeping. Besides, my mama's death was no surprise to me. To Oskar, who went to the city with her on Thursdays and to the Church of the Sacred Heart on Saturdays, it seemed as though she had been searching for years for a way of breaking up the triangle that would leave Matzerath, whom perhaps she hated, with the guilt and enable Jan Bronski, her Jan, to continue his work at the Polish Post Office fortified by thoughts such as: she died for me, she didn't want to stand in my way, she sacrificed herself.

With all the cool calculation the two of them, Mama and Jan, were capable of when it was a question of finding an undisturbed bed for their love, they nevertheless revealed quite a talent for romance: it requires no great stretch of the imagination to identify them with Romeo and Juliet or with the prince and princess who allegedly were unable to get together because the water was too deep.

While Mama, who had received the last sacraments in plenty of time, lay submissive to the priest's prayers, cold and impervious to anything that could be said or done, I found it in me to watch the nurses, who were mostly of the Protestant faith. They folded their hands differently from the Catholics, more self-reliantly I should say, they said the Our Father with a wording that deviates from the original Catholic text, and they did not cross themselves like Grandma Koljaiczek, the Bronskis, and myself for that matter. My father Matzerath—I sometimes call him so even though his begetting of me was purely presumptive—prayed differently from the other Protestants; instead of clasping his hands over his chest, he let his fingers pass hysterically from one religion to another somewhere in the vicinity of his private parts, and was obviously ashamed to be seen praying. My grandmother knelt by the deathbed beside her brother Vincent; she prayed loudly and vehemently in Kashubian, while Vincent only moved his lips, presumably in Polish, though his eyes were wide with spiritual experience. I should have liked to drum. After all I had my mother to thank for all those red and white drums. As a counterweight to Matzerath's desires, she had promised me a drum while I lay in my cradle; and from time to time Mama's beauty, particularly when she was still

slender and had no need for gymnastics, had served as the model and subject matter for my drumming. At length I was unable to control myself; once again, by my mother's deathbed, I re-created the ideal image of her grey-eyed beauty on my drum. The head nurse protested at once, and I was very much surprised when it was Matzerath who mollified her and took my part, whispering: "Let him be, sister. They were so fond of each other."

Mama could be very gay, she could also be very anxious. Mama could forget quickly, yet she had a good memory. Mama would throw me out with the bath water, and yet she would share my bath. When I sang windowpanes to pieces, Mama was on hand with putty. Sometimes she put her foot in it even when there were plenty of safe places to step. Sometimes Mama was lost to me, but her finder went with her. Even when Mama buttoned up, she was an open book to me. Mama feared drafts but was always stirring up a storm. She lived on an expense account and disliked to pay taxes. I was the reverse of her coin. When Mama played a heart hand, she always won. When Mama died, the red flames on my drum casing paled a little; but the white lacquer became whiter than ever and so dazzling that Oskar was sometimes obliged to close his eyes.

My mama was not buried at Saspe as she had occasionally said she would like to be, but in the peaceful little cemetery at Brenntau. There lay her stepfather Gregor Koljaiczek the powder-maker, who had died of influenza in '17. The mourners were numerous, as was only natural in view of my mama's popularity as a purveyor of groceries; in addition to the regular customers, there were salesmen from some of the wholesale houses, and even a few competitors turned up, such as Weinreich Fancy Groceries, and Mrs. Probst from Hertastrasse. The cemetery chapel was too small to hold the crowd. It smelled of flowers and black clothing seasoned with mothballs. My mother's face, in the open coffin, was yellow and ravaged. During the interminable ceremony I couldn't help feeling that her head would bob up again any minute and that she would have to vomit some more, that there was something more inside her that wanted to come out: not only that fetus aged three months who like me didn't know which father he had to thank for his existence; no, I thought, it's not just he who wants to come out and, like Oskar, demand a drum, no, there's more fish, not sardines, and not flounder, no, it's a little chunk of

eel, a few whitish-green threads of eel flesh, eel from the battle of the Skagerrak, eel from the Neufahrwasser breakwater, Good Friday eel, eel from that horse's head, possibly eel from her father Joseph Koljaiczek who ended under the raft, a prey to the eels, eel of thine eel, for eel thou art, to eel returnest . . .

But my mama didn't retch. She kept it down and it was evidently her intention to take it with her into the ground, that at last there might be peace.

When the men picked up the coffin lid with a view to shutting in my mama's nauseated yet resolute face, Anna Koljaiczek barred the way. Trampling the flowers round the coffin, she threw herself upon her daughter and wept, tore at the expensive white shroud, and wailed in Kashubian.

There were many who said later that she had cursed my presumptive father Matzerath, calling him her daughter's murderer. She is also said to have spoken of my fall down the cellar stairs. She took over the story from Mama and never allowed Matzerath to forget his ostensible responsibility for my ostensible misfortune. These accusations never ceased although Matzerath, in defiance of all political considerations and almost against his will, treated her with a respect bordering on reverence and during the war years supplied her with sugar and synthetic honey, coffee and kerosene.

Greff the vegetable dealer and Jan Bronski, who was weeping in a high feminine register, led my grandmother away from the coffin. The men were able to fasten the lid and at last to put on the faces that pallbearers always put on when they lift up a coffin.

In Brenntau Cemetery with its two fields on either side of the avenue bordered by elm trees, with its little chapel that looked like a set for a Nativity play, with its well and its brightly little birds, Matzerath led the procession and I followed. It was then for the first time that I took a liking to the shape of a coffin. Since then I have often had occasion to gaze upon dark-colored wood employed for ultimate ends. My mama's coffin was black. It tapered in the most wonderfully harmonious way, toward the foot end. Is there any other form in this world so admirably suited to the proportions of the human body?

If beds only had that narrowing at the foot end! If only all our habitual and occasional lying could taper off so unmistakably toward the foot end. For with all the airs we give ourselves, the ostentatious bulk of our head, shoulders,

and torso tapers off toward the feet, and on this narrow base the whole edifice must rest.

Matzerath went directly behind the coffin. He carried his top hat in his hand and, despite his grief and the slow pace, made every effort to keep his knees stiff. I always felt sorry for him when I saw him from the rear; that protuberant occiput and those two throbbing arteries that grew out of his collar and mounted to his hairline.

Why was it Mother Truczinski rather than Gretchen Scheffler or Hedwig Bronski who took me by the hand? She lived on the second floor of our house and apparently had no first name, for everyone called her Mother Truczinski.

Before the coffin went Father Wiehnke with a sexton bearing incense. My eyes slipped from the back of Matzerath's neck to the furrowed necks of the pallbearers. I had to fight down a passionate desire: Oskar wanted to climb up on the coffin. He wanted to sit up there and drum. However, it was not his tin instrument but the coffin lid that he wished to assail with his drumsticks. He wanted to ride aloft, swaying in the rhythm of the pallbearers' weary gait. He wanted to drum for the mourners who were repeating their prayers after Father Wiehnke. And as they lowered the casket into the ground, he wished to stand firm on the lid. During the sermon, the bell-ringing, the dispensing of incense and holy water, he wished to beat out his Latin on the wood as they lowered him into the grave with the coffin. He wished to go down into the pit with Mama and the fetus. And there he wished to remain while the survivors tossed in their handfuls of earth, no, Oskar didn't wish to come up, he wished to sit on the tapering foot end of the coffin, drumming if possible, drumming under the earth, until the sticks rotted out of his hands, until his mama for his sake and he for her sake should rot away, giving their flesh to the earth and its inhabitants; with his very knuckles Oskar would have wished to drum for the fetus, if it had only been possible and allowed.

No one sat on the coffin. Unoccupied, it swayed beneath the elms and weeping willows of Brenntau Cemetery. In among the graves the sexton's spotted chickens, picking for worms, reaping what they had not sowed. Then through the birches. Hand in hand with Mother Truczinski. Ahead of me Matzerath, and directly behind me my grandmother

on the arms of Greff and Jan; then Vincent Bronski on Hedwig's arm, then little Marga and Stephan hand in hand, then the Schefflers. Then Laubschad the watchmaker, old Mr. Heilandt, and Meyn the trumpeter, but without his instrument and relatively sober.

Only when it was all over and the condolences started, did I notice Sigismund Markus. Black-clad and embarrassed, he joined the crowd of those who wished to shake hands with me, my grandmother, and the Bronskis and mumble something. At first I failed to understand what Alexander Scheffler wanted of Markus. They hardly knew each other, perhaps they had never spoken to one another before. Then Meyn the musician joined forces with Scheffler. They stood beside a waist-high hedge made of that green stuff that discolors and tastes bitter when you rub it between your fingers. Mrs. Kater and her daughter Susi, who was grinning behind her handkerchief and had grown rather too quickly, were just tendering their sympathies to Matzerath, naturally—how could they help it?—patting my head in the process. The altercation behind the hedge grew louder but was still unintelligible. Meyn the trumpeter thrust his index finger at Markus' black façade and pushed; then he seized one of Sigismund's arms while Scheffler took the other. Both were very careful that Markus, who was walking backward, should not stumble over the borders of the tombs; thus they pushed him as far as the main avenue, where they showed him where the gate was. Markus seemed to thank them for the information and started for the exit; he put on his silk hat and never looked around at Meyn and the baker, though they looked after him.

Neither Matzerath nor Mother Truczinski saw me wander away from them and the condolences. Assuming the manner of a little boy who has to go, Oskar slipped back past the gravedigger and his assistant. Then, without regard for the ivy, he ran to the elms, catching up with Sigismund Markus before the exit.

"If it ain't little Oskar," said Markus with surprise. "Say, what are they doing to Markus? What did Markus ever do to them they should treat him so?"

I didn't know what Markus had done. I took him by his hand, it was clammy with sweat, and led him through the open wrought-iron gate, and there in the gateway the two of us, the keeper of my drums and I, the drummer, possibly the

drummer, ran into Leo Schugger, who like us believed in paradise.

Markus knew Leo, everyone in town knew him. I had heard of him, I knew that one sunny day while he was still at the seminary, the world, the sacraments, the religions, heaven and earth, life and death had been so shaken up in his mind that forever after his vision of the world, though mad, had been radiant and perfect.

Leo Schugger's occupation was to turn up after funerals—and no one could pass away without his getting wind of it—wearing a shiny black suit several sizes too big for him and white gloves, and wait for the mourners. Markus and I were both aware that it was in his professional capacity that he was standing there at the gate of Brenntau Cemetery, waiting with slavering mouth, compassionate gloves, and watery blue eyes for the mourners to come out.

It was bright and sunny, mid-May. Plenty of birds in the hedges and trees. Cackling hens, symbolizing immortality with and through their eggs. Buzzing in the air. Fresh coat of green, no dust. Bearing a tired topper in his left gloved hand, Leo Schugger, moving with the lightness of a dancer, for grace had touched him, stepped up to Markus and myself, advancing five mildewed gloved fingers. Standing aslant as if to brace himself against the wind, though there was none, he tilted his head and blubbered, spinning threads of saliva. Hesitantly at first, then with resolution, Markus inserted his bare hand in the animated glove. "What a beautiful day!" Leo blubbered. "She has already arrived where everything is so cheap. Did you see the Lord? *Habemus ad Dominum*. He just passed by in a hurry. Amen."

We said amen. Markus agreed about the beautiful day and even said yes he had seen the Lord.

Behind us we heard the mourners buzzing closer. Markus let his hand fall from Leo's glove, found time to give him a tip, gave me a Markus kind of look, and rushed away toward the taxi that was waiting for him outside the Brenntau post office.

I was still looking after the cloud of dust that obscured the receding Markus when Mother Truczinski took my hand. They came in groups and grouplets. Leo Schugger had sympathies for all; he called attention to the fine day, asked everyone if he had seen the Lord, and as usual received tips of varying magnitude. Matzerath and Jan Bronski paid the

pallbearers, the gravedigger, the sexton, and Father Wiehnke, who with a sigh of embarrassment let Leo Schugger kiss his hand and then proceeded, with his kissed hand, to toss wisps of benediction after the slowly dispersing funeral company.

Meanwhile we—my grandmother, her brother Vincent, the Bronskis with their children, Greff without wife, and Gretchen Scheffler—took our seats in two common farm wagons. We were driven past Goldkrug through the woods across the nearby Polish border to the funeral supper at Bissau Quarry.

Vincent Bronski's farm lay in a hollow. There were poplars in front of it that were supposed to divert the lightning. The barn door was removed from its hinges, laid on saw horses, and covered with tablecloths. More people came from the vicinity. It was some time before the meal was ready. It was served in the barn doorway. Gretchen Scheffler held me on her lap. First there was something fatty, then something sweet, then more fat. There was potato schnaps, beer, a roast goose and a roast pig, cake with sausage, sweet and sour squash, fruit pudding with sour cream. Toward evening a slight breeze came blowing through the open barn, here was a scurrying of mice and of Bronski children, who, in league with the neighborhood urchins, took possession of the barnyard.

Oil lamps were brought out, and skat cards. The potato schnaps stayed where it was. There was also homemade egg liqueur that made for good cheer. Greff did not drink but he sang songs. The Kashubians sang too, and Matzerath had first deal. Jan was the second hand and the foreman from the brickworks the third. Only then did it strike me that my poor mama was missing. They played until well into the night, but none of the men succeeded in winning a heart hand. After Jan Bronski for no apparent reason had lost a heart hand without four, I heard him say to Matzerath in an undertone: "Agnes would surely have won that hand."

Then I slipped off Gretchen Scheffler's lap and found my grandmother and her brother Vincent outside. They were sitting on a wagon shaft. Vincent was muttering to the stars in Polish. My grandmother couldn't cry any more but she let me crawl under her skirts.

Who will take me under her skirts today? Who will shelter me from the daylight and the lamplight? Who will give me the smell of melted yellow, slightly rancid butter that my

grandmother used to stock for me beneath her skirts and feed me to make me put on weight?

I fell asleep beneath her four skirts, close to my poor mama's beginnings and as still as she, though not so short of air as she in her box tapered at the foot end.

Herbert Truczinski's Back

NOTHING, SO THEY say, can take the place of a mother. Soon after her funeral I began to miss my poor mama. There were no more Thursday visits to Sigismund Markus' shop, no one led me to Sister Inge's white uniforms, and most of all the Saturdays made me painfully aware of Mama's death: Mama didn't go to confession any more.

And so there was no more old city for me, no more Dr. Hollatz' office, and no more Church of the Sacred Heart. I had lost interest in demonstrations. And how was I to lure passers-by to shopwindows when even the tempter's trade had lost its charm for Oskar? There was no more Mama to take me to the Christmas play at the Stadt-Theater or to the Krone or Busch circus. Conscientious but morose, I went about my studies, strode dismally through the rectilinear suburban streets to the Kleinhammer-Weg, visited Gretchen Scheffler, who told me about Strength through Joy trips to the land of the midnight sun, while I went right on comparing Goethe with Rasputin or, when I had enough of the cyclic and endless alternation of dark and radiant, took refuge in historical studies. My old standard works, *A Struggle for Rome*, Keyser's *History of the City of Danzig*, and Köhler's *Naval Calendar*, gave me an encyclopedic half-knowledge. To this day I am capable of giving you exact figures about the building, launching, armor, firepower, and crew strength of all the ships that took part in the battle of the Skagerrak, that sank or were damaged on that occasion.

I was almost fourteen, I loved solitude and took many walks. My drum went with me but I was sparing in my use of it, because with Mama's departure a punctual delivery of tin drums became problematic.

Was it in the autumn of '37 or the spring of '38? In any case, I was making my way up the Hindenburg-Allee toward the city, I was not far from the Café of the Four Seasons, the leaves were falling or the buds were bursting, in any event something was going on in nature, when whom should I meet but my friend and master Bebra, who

drummed her into her grave. Because of Oskar she didn't want to live any more; he killed her."

I was exaggerating quite a bit, I wanted to impress Signora Roswitha. Most people blamed Matzerath and especially Jan Bronski for Mama's death. Bebra saw through me.

"You are exaggerating, my good friend. Out of sheer jealousy you are angry with your dead mama. You feel humiliated because it wasn't you but those wearisome lovers that sent her to her grave. You are vain and wicked—as a genius should be."

Then with a sigh and a sidelong glance at Signora Roswitha: "it is not easy for people our size to get through life. To remain human without external growth, what a task, what a vocation!"

Roswitha Raguna, the Neapolitan somnambulist with the smooth yet wrinkled skin, she whose age I estimated at eighteen summers but an instant later revered as an old lady of eighty or ninety, Signora Roswitha stroked Mr. Bebra's fashionable English tailor-made suit, projected her cherry-black Mediterranean eyes in my direction, and spoke with a dark voice, bearing promise of fruit, a voice that moved me and turned me to ice: "*Carissimo*, Oskarnello! How well I understand your grief. *Andiamo*, come with us: Milano, Parigi, Toledo, Guatemala!"

My head reeled. I grasped la Raguna's girlish age-old hand. The Mediterranean beat against my coast, olive trees whispered in my ear: "Roswitha will be your mama, Roswitha will understand. Roswitha, the great somnambulist, who sees through everyone, who knows everyone's innermost soul, only not her own, *mamma mia*, only not her own, *Dio!*"

Oddly enough, la Raguna had no sooner begun to see through me, to X-ray my soul with her somnambulist gaze, than she suddenly withdrew her hand. Had my hungry fourteen-year-old heart filled her with horror? Had it dawned on her that to me Roswitha, whether maiden or hag, meant Roswitha? She whispered in Neapolitan, trembled, crossed herself over and over again as though there were no end to the horrors she found within me, and disappeared without a word behind her fan.

I demanded an explanation, I asked Mr. Bebra to say something. But even Bebra, despite his direct descent from Prince Eugene, had lost his countenance. He began to stammer and this was what I was finally able to make out: "Your genius, my young friend, the divine, but also no doubt the

vanished inside it—for the Ford was made for grownups, it looked empty as though cruising for customers as it drove off with my friends.

I tried to persuade Matzerath to take me to the Krone circus, but Matzerath was not to be moved; he gave himself entirely to his grief for my poor mama, whom he had never possessed entirely. But who had? Not even Jan Bronski; if anyone, myself, for it was Oskar who suffered most from her absence, which upset, and threatened the very existence of, his daily life. Mama had let me down. There was nothing to be expected of my fathers. Bebra my master had found his master in Propaganda Minister Goebbels. Gretchen Scheffler was entirely taken up with her Winter Relief work. Let no one go hungry, let no one suffer cold. I had only my drum to turn to, I beat out my loneliness on its once white surface, now drummed thin. In the evening Matzerath and I sat facing one another. He leafed through his cookbooks, I lamented on my drum. Sometimes Matzerath wept and hid his head in the cookbooks. Jan Bronski's visits became more and more infrequent. In view of the political situation, both men thought they had better be careful, there was no way of knowing which way the wind would blow. The skat games with changing thirds became fewer and farther between; when there was a game, it was late at night under the hanging lamp in our living room, and all political discussion was avoided. My grandmother Anna seemed to have forgotten the way from Bissau to our place in Labesweg. She had it in for Matzerath and maybe for me too; once I had heard her say: "My Agnes died because she couldn't stand the drumming any more."

Despite any guilt I may have felt for my poor mama's death, I clung all the more desperately to my despised drum; for it did not die as a mother dies, you could buy a new one, or you could have it repaired by old man Heilandt or Laubschad the watchmaker, it understood me, it always gave the right answer, it stuck to me as I stuck to it.

In those days the apartment became too small for me, the streets too long or too short for my fourteen years: in the daytime there was no occasion to play the tempter outside of shopwindows and the temptation to tempt was not urgent enough to make me lurk in dark doorways at night. I was reduced to tramping up and down the four staircases of our apartment house in time to my drum; I counted a hundred and sixteen steps, stopped at every landing, breathed

"Don't drum so loud, Oskar. Herbert's still sleeping, he's had a rough night again, they had to bring him home in an ambulance." She pulled me into the flat, poured me imitation coffee with milk, and gave me a piece of brown rock candy on a string to dip into the coffee and lick. I drank, sucked the rock candy, and let my drum rest.

Mother Truczinski had a little round head, covered so transparently with thin, ash-grey hair that her pink scalp shone through. The sparse threads converged at the back of her head to form a bun which despite its small size—it was smaller than a billiard ball—could be seen from all sides however she twisted and turned. It was held together with knitting needles. Every morning Mother Truczinski rubbed her round cheeks, which when she laughed looked as if they had been pasted on, with the paper from chicory packages, which was red and discolored. Her expression was that of a mouse. Her four children were named Herbert, Guste, Fritz, and Maria.

Maria was my age. She had just finished grade school and was living with a family of civil servants in Schidlitz, learning to do housework. Fritz, who was working at the railway coach factory, was seldom seen. He had two or three girl friends who received him by turns in their beds and went dancing with him at the "Race Track" in Ohra. He kept rabbits in the court, "Vienna blues," but it was Mother Truczinski who had to take care of them, for Fritz had his hands full with his girl friends. Guste, a quiet soul of about thirty, was a waitress at the Hotel Eden by the Central Station. Still unwed, she lived on the top floor of the Eden with the rest of the staff. Apart from Monsieur Fritz' occasional overnight visits, that left only Herbert, the eldest, at home with his mother. Herbert worked as a waiter in the harbor suburb of Naufahrwasser. For a brief happy period after the death of my poor mama, Herbert Truczinski was my purpose in life; to this day I call him my friend.

Herbert worked for Starbusch. Starbusch was the owner of the Sweden Bar, which was situated across the street from the Protestant Seamen's Church; the customers, as the name might lead one to surmise, were mostly Scandinavians. But there were also Russians, Poles from the Free Port, long-shoremen from Holm, and sailors from the German warships that happened to be in the harbor. It was not without its perils to be a waiter in this very international spot. Only the experience he had amassed at the Ohra "Race Track"—the third-class dance hall where Herbert had worked before going

to Neufahrwasser—enabled him to dominate the linguistic volcano of the Sweden Bar with his suburban Plattdeutsch interspersed with crumbs of English and Polish. Even so, he would come home in an ambulance once or twice a month, involuntarily but free of charge.

Then Herbert would have to lie in bed for a few days, face down and breathing hard, for he weighed well over two hundred pounds. On these days Mother Truczinski complained steadily while taking care of him with equal perseverance. After changing his bandages, she would extract a knitting needle from her bun and tap it on the glass of a picture that hung across from Herbert's bed. It was a retouched photograph of a man with a mustache and a solemn steadfast look, who closely resembled some of the mustachioed individuals on the first pages of my own photograph album.

This gentleman, however, at whom Mother Truczinski pointing her knitting needle, was no member of my family, it was Herbert's, Guste's, Fritz', and Maria's father.

"One of these days you're going to end up like your father," she would chide the moaning, groaning Herbert. But she never stated clearly how and where this man in the black lacquer frame had gone looking for and met his end.

"What happened this time?" inquired the grey-haired mouse over her folded arms.

"Same as usual. Swedes and Norwegians." The bed groaned as Herbert shifted his position.

"Same as usual, he says. Don't make out like it was always them. Last time it was those fellows from the training ship, what's it called, well, speak up, that's it, the *Schlageter*, that's just what I've been saying, and you try to tell me it's the Swedes and Norskes."

Herbert's ear—I couldn't see his face—turned red to the brim: "God-damn Heinies, always shooting their yap and throwing their weight around."

"Leave them be. What business is it of yours? They always look respectable when I see them in town on their time off. You been lecturing them about Lenin again, or starting up on the Spanish Civil War?"

Herbert suspended his answers and Mother Truczinski shuffled off to her imitation coffee in the kitchen.

As soon as Herbert's back was healed, I was allowed to look at it. He would be sitting in the kitchen chair with his braces hanging down over his blue-clad thighs, and slowly, as

though hindered by grave thoughts, he would strip off his woolen shirt.

His back was round, always in motion. Muscles kept moving up and down. A rosy landscape strewn with freckles. The spinal column was embedded in fat. On either side of it a luxuriant growth of hair descended from below the shoulder blades to disappear beneath the woolen underdrawers that Herbert wore even in the summer. From his neck muscles down to the edge of the underdrawers Herbert's back was covered with thick scars which interrupted the vegetation, effaced the freckles. Multicolored, ranging from blue-black to greenish-white, they formed creases and itched when the weather changed. These scars I was permitted to touch.

What, I should like to know, have I, who lie here in bed, looking out of the window, I who for months have been gazing at and through the outbuildings of this mental hospital and the Oberrath Forest behind them, what to this day have I been privileged to touch that felt as hard, as sensitive, and as disconcerting as the scars on Herbert Truczinski's back? In the same class I should put the secret parts of a few women and young girls, my own pecker, the plaster watering can of the boy Jesus, and the ring finger which scarcely two years ago that dog found in a rye field and brought to me, which a year ago I was still allowed to keep, in a preserving jar to be sure where I couldn't get at it, yet so distinct and complete that to this day I can still feel and count each one of its joints with the help of my drumsticks. Whenever I wanted to recall Herbert Truczinski's back, I would sit drumming with that preserved finger in front of me, helping my memory with my drum. Whenever I wished—which was not very often—to reconstitute a woman's body, Oskar, not sufficiently convinced by a woman's scarlike parts, would invent Herbert Truczinski's scars. But I might just as well put it the other way around and say that my first contact with those welts on my friend's broad back gave promise even then of acquaintance with, and temporary possession of, those short-lived indurations characteristic of women ready for love. Similarly the symbols on Herbert's back gave early promise of the ring finger, and before Herbert's scars made promises, it was my drumsticks, from my third birthday on, which promised scars, reproductive organs, and finally the ring finger. But I must go back still farther: when I was still an embryo, before Oskar was even called Oskar, my umbilical cord, as I sat playing with it, promised me succe-

at the same table like brothers. And then the character from Gdingen says: Russki. The Ukrainian wasn't going to take that lying down; if there was one thing he didn't want to be, it was a Russki. He'd been floating logs down the Vistula and various other rivers before that, and he had a pile of dough in his shoe. He'd already spent half his shoeful buying rounds of drinks when the character from Gdingen called him a Russki, and I had to separate the two of them, soft and gentle the way I always do. Well, Herbert has his hands full. At this point the Ukrainian calls me a Water Polack, and the Polack, who spends his time hauling up muck on a dredger, calls me something that sounds like Nazi. Well, my boy, you know Herbert Truczinski: a minute later the guy from the dredger, pasty-faced guy, looks like a stoker, is lying doubled-up by the coatroom. I'm just beginning to tell the Ukrainian what the difference is between a Water Polack and a citizen of Danzig when he gives it to me from behind—and that's the scar."

When Herbert said "and that's the scar," he always lent emphasis to his words by turning the pages of his paper and taking a gulp of coffee. Then I was allowed to press the next scar, sometimes once, sometimes twice.

"Oh, that one! It don't amount to much. That was two years ago when the torpedo boat flotilla from Pillau tied up here. Christ, the way they swaggered around, playing the sailor boy and driving the little chickadees nuts. How Schwiemel ever got into the Navy is a mystery to me. He was from Dresden, try to get that through your head, Oskar my boy, from Dresden. But you don't know, you don't even suspect what it means for a sailor to come from Dresden."

Herbert's thoughts were lingering much too long for my liking in the fair city on the Elbe. To lure them back to Neufahrwasser, I once again pressed the scar which in his opinion didn't amount to much.

"Well, as I was saying. He was a signalman second class on a torpedo boat. Talked big. He thought he'd start up with a quiet kind of Scotsman what his tub was in drydock. Starts talking about Chamberlain, umbrellas and such. I advised him, very quietly the way I do, to stow that kind of talk, especially 'cause the Scotsman didn't understand a word and was just painting pictures with schnaps on the table top. So I tell him to leave the guy alone, you're not home now, I tell him, you're a guest of the League of Nations. At this point, the torpedo fritz calls me a 'pocketbook German', he

says it in Saxon what's more. Quick I bop him one or two, and that calms him down. Half an hour later, I'm bending down to pick up a coin that had rolled under the table and I can't see 'cause it's dark under the table, so the Saxon pulls out his pickpick and sticks it into me."

Laughing, Herbert turned over the pages of the *Neueste Nachrichten*, added "And that's the scar," pushed the newspaper over to the grumbling Mother Truczinski, and prepared to get up. Quickly, before Herbert could leave for the can—he was pulling himself up by the table edge and I could see from the look on his face where he was headed for—I pressed a black and violet scar that was as wide as a skat card is long. You could still see where the stitches had been.

"Herbert's got to go, boy. I'll tell you afterwards." But I pressed again and began to fuss and play the three-year-old, that always helped.

"All right, just to keep you quiet. But I'll make it short." Herbert sat down again. "That was on Christmas, 1930. There was nothing doing in the port. The longshoremen were hanging around the streetcorners, betting who could spit farthest. After midnight Mass—we'd just finished mixing the punch—the Swedes and Finns came pouring out of the Seamen's Church across the street. I saw they were up to no good, I'm standing in the doorway, looking at those pious faces, wondering why they're playing that way with their anchor buttons. And already she breaks loose: long are the knives and short is the night. Oh, well, Finns and Swedes always did have it in for each other. By why Herbert Truczinski should get mixed up with those characters, God only knows. He must have a screw loose, because when something's going on, Herbert's sure to be in on it. Well, that's the moment I pick to go outside. Starbusch sees me and shouts: 'Herbert, watch out!' But I had my good deed to do. My idea was to save the pastor, poor little fellow, he'd just come down from Malmö fresh out of the seminary, and this was his first Christmas with Finns and Swedes in the same church. So my idea is to take him under my wing and see to it that he gets home with a whole skin. I just had my hand on his coat when I feel something cold in my back and Happy New Year I say to myself though it was only Christmas Eve. When I come to, I'm lying on the bar, and my good red blood is running into the beer glasses free of charge, and Starbusch

is there with his Red Cross medicine kit, trying to give me so-called first aid."

"What," said Mother Truczinski, furiously pulling her knitting needle out of her bun, "makes you interested in a pastor all of a sudden when you haven't set foot in a church since you was little?"

Herbert waved away her disapproval and, trailing his shirt and braces after him, repaired to the can. His gait was somber and somber was the voice in which he said: "And that's the scar." He walked as if he wished once and for all to get away from that church and the knife battles connected with it, as though the can were the place where a man is, becomes, or remains a freethinker.

A few weeks later I found Herbert speechless and in no mood to have his scars questioned. He seemed dispirited, but he hadn't the usual bandage on his back. Actually I found him lying back down on the living-room couch, rather than nursing his wounds in his bed, and yet he seemed seriously hurt. I heard him sigh, appealing to God, Marx, and Engels and cursing them in the same breath. Now and then he would shake his fist in the air, and then let it fall on his chest; a moment later his other fist would join in, and he would pound his chest like a Catholic crying *mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*.

Herbert had knocked a Latvian sea captain dead. The court acquitted him—he had struck, a frequent occurrence in his trade, in self-defense. But despite his acquittal the Latvian remained a dead Latvian and weighed on his mind like a ton of bricks, although he was said to have been a frail little man, afflicted with a stomach ailment to boot.

Herbert didn't go back to work. He had given notice. Starbusch, his boss, came to see him a number of times. He would sit by Herbert's couch or with Mother Truczinski at the kitchen table. From his briefcase he would produce a bottle of Stobbe's 100 proof gin for Herbert and for Mother Truczinski half a pound of unroasted real coffee from the Free Port. He was always either trying to persuade Herbert to come back to work or trying to persuade Mother Truczinski to persuade her son. But Herbert was adamant—he didn't want to be a waiter any more, and certainly not in Neufahrwasser across the street from the Seamen's Church. Actually he didn't want to be a waiter altogether, for to be a waiter means having knives stuck into you and to have knives stuck into you means knocking a Latvian sea captain

dead one fine day, just because you're trying to keep him at a distance, trying to prevent a Latvian knife from adding a Latvian scar to all the Finnish, Swedish, Polish, Free-City, and German scars on Herbert Truczinski's lengthwise and crosswise belabored back.

"I'd sooner go to work for the customs than be a waiter any more in Neufahrwasser," said Herbert. But he didn't go to work for the customs.

Niobe

IN '38 THE customs duties were raised and the borders between Poland and the Free City were temporarily closed. My grandmother was unable to take the narrow-gauge railway to the market in Langfuhr and had to close her stand. She was left sitting on her eggs so to speak, though with little desire to hatch them. In the port the herring stank to high heaven, the goods piled up, and statesmen met and came to an agreement. Meanwhile my friend Herbert lay on the couch, unemployed and divided against himself, mulling over his troubles.

And yet the customs service offered wages and bread. It offered green uniforms and a border that was worth guarding. Herbert didn't go to the customs and he didn't want to be a waiter any more; he only wanted to lie on the couch and mull.

But a man must work. And not only Mother Truczinski was of that opinion. Although she resisted Starbusch's pleas that she persuade Herbert to go back to waiting on tables in Neufahrwasser, she definitely wanted to get Herbert off that couch. He himself was soon sick of the two-room flat, his mulling had become purely superficial, and he began one fine day to look through the Help Wanted ads in the *Neueste Nachrichten* and reluctantly, in the Nazi paper, the *Vorposten*.

I wanted to help him. Should a man like Herbert have to look for work other than his proper occupation in the harbor suburb? Should he be reduced to stevedoring, to odd jobs, to burying rotten herring? I couldn't see Herbert standing on the Mottlau bridges, spitting at the gulls and degenerating into a tobacco chewer. It occurred to me that Herbert and I might start up a partnership: two hours of concentrated work once a week and we would be made men. Aided by his still diamond-like voice, Oskar, his wits sharpened by long experience in this field, would open up shop-windows with worthwhile displays and stand guard at the same time, while Herbert would be quick with his fingers. We needed no blowtorch, no passkeys, no tool kit. We

dressed neatly and went briskly about his business while, miserably underfed, his four cats, relics of a drunken but splendidly musical era, went slowly to the dogs. On the other hand, I often, coming home late at night, found Matzerath, who in Mama's lifetime had drunk only in company, sitting glassy-eyed behind a row of schnaps glasses. He would be leafing through the photograph album, trying, as I am now, to bring Mama to life in the little, none too successfully exposed rectangles; toward midnight he would weep himself into an elegiac mood, and begin to apostrophize Hitler or Beethoven, who still hung there looking each other gloomily in the eye. From the genius, who, it must be remembered, was deaf, he seemed to receive an answer, while the tea-totaling Führer was silent, because Matzerath, a drunken little unit leader, was unworthy of Providence.

One Tuesday—so accurate is my memory thanks to my drum—Herbert finally made up his mind. He threw on his duds, that is, he had Mother Truczinski brush his blue bell-bottom trousers with cold coffee, squeezed into his sport shoes, poured himself into his jacket with the anchor buttons, sprinkled the white silk scarf from the Free Port with cologne which had also ripened on the duty-free dung-heap of the Free Port, and soon stood there ready to go, stiff and square in his blue visor cap.

"Guess I'll have a look around for a job," said Herbert, giving a faintly audacious tilt to his cap. Mother Truczinski let her newspaper sink to the table.

Next day Herbert had a job and a uniform. It was not customs-green but dark grey; he had become a guard in the Maritime Museum.

Like everything that was worth preserving in this city so altogether deserving to be preserved, the treasures of the Maritime Museum occupied an old patrician mansion with a raised stone porch and a playfully but substantially ornamented façade. The inside, full of carved dark oak and winding staircases, was devoted to records of the carefully catalogued history of our seaport town, which had always prided itself on its ability to grow or remain stinking rich in the midst of its powerful but for the most part poor neighbors. Ah, those privileges, purchased from the Teutonic Knights or from the kings of Poland and elaborately defined in elaborate documents! Those color engravings of the innumerable sieges incurred by the fortress at the mouth of the Vistula! There within the walls of the city stands Stani-

John Leszczynski, who has just fled from the Saxon anti-king. The oil painting shows exactly how scared he is. Primate Potocki and de Monti the French ambassador are also scared out of their wits, because the Russians under General Laszcy are besieging the city. All these scenes are accurately labeled, and the names of the French ships are legible beneath the fleur-de-lis banner. A legend with an arrow informs us that on this ship King Stanislaw Leszczynski fled to Lorraine when the city was surrendered on the third of August. But most of the exhibits consisted of trophies acquired in wars that had been won, for the simple reason that lost wars seldom or never provide museums with trophies.

The pride of the collection was the figurehead from a large Florentine galleon which, though its home port was Bruges, belonged to the Florentine merchants Portinari and Tani. In April, 1473, the Danzig city-captains and pirates Paul Beneke and Martin Bardewick succeeded, while cruising off the coast of Zealand not far from Sluys, in capturing the galleon. The captain, the officers, and a considerable crew were put to the sword, while the ship with its cargo were taken to Danzig. A folding "Last Judgment" by Memling and a golden baptismal font--both commissioned by Tani for a church in Florence--found a home in the Marienkirche; today, as far as I know, the "Last Judgment" gladdens the Catholic eyes of Poland. It is not known what became of the figurehead after the war. But in my time it was in the Maritime Museum.

A luxuriant wooden woman, green and naked, arms upraised and hands indolently clasped in such a way as to reveal every single one of her fingers; sunken amber eyes gazing out over resolute, forward-looking breasts. This woman, this figurehead, was a bringer of disaster. She had been commissioned by Portinari the merchant from a sculptor with a reputation for carving figureheads; the model was a Flemish girl close to Portinari. Scarcely had the green figure taken its place beneath the bowsprit of a galleon than the girl, as was then customary, was put on trial for witchcraft. Put to the question before going up in flames, she had implicated her patron, the Florentine merchant, as well as the sculptor who had taken her measurements so expertly. Portinari is said to have hanged himself for fear of the fire. As to the sculptor, they chopped off both his gifted hands to prevent him from ever again transforming witches into figureheads. While the trials were still going on in

Bruges, creating quite a stir because Portinari was a rich man, the ship bearing the figurehead fell into the piratical hands of Paul Beneke. Signor Tani, the second merchant, fell beneath a pirate's poleax. Paul Beneke was the next victim; a few years later he incurred the disfavor of the patricians of his native city and was drowned in the courtyard of the Stockturn. Ships to whose bows the figurehead was affixed after Beneke's death had a habit of bursting into flames before they had even put out of the harbor, and the fire would spread to other vessels; everything burned but the figurehead, which was fireproof and, what with her alluring curves, always found admirers among shipowners. But no sooner had this woman taken her place on a vessel than mutiny broke out and the crew, who had always been a peaceful lot until then, decimated each other. The unsuccessful Danish expedition of the Danzig fleet under the highly gifted Eberhard Ferber in the year 1522 led to Ferber's downfall and bloody insurrection in the city. The history books, it is true, speak of religious disorders—in 1523, a Protestant pastor named Hegge led a mob in an iconoclastic assault on the city's seven parish churches—but we prefer to blame the figurehead for this catastrophe whose effects were felt for many years to come; it is known at all events that the green woman graced the prow of Ferber's ship.

When Stefan Batory vainly besieged the city fifty years later, Kaspar Jeschke, abbot of the Oliva Monastery, put the blame on the sinful woman in his penitential sermons. The king of the Poles, to whom the city had made a present of her, took her with him in his encampments, and she gave him bad advice. To what extent the wooden lady affected the Swedish campaigns against the city and how much she had to do with the long incarceration of Dr. Aegidius Strauch, the religious zealot who had conspired with the Swedes and also demanded that the green woman, who had meanwhile found her way back into the city, be burned, we do not know. There is a rather obscure report to the effect that a poet by the name of Opitz, a fugitive from Silesia, was granted asylum in the city for some years but died before his time, having found the ruinous wood carving in an attic and having attempted to write poems in her honor.

Only toward the end of the eighteenth century, at the time of the partitions of Poland, were effective measures taken against her. The Prussians, who had taken the force of arms, issued a Royal Prussian edict pr

"the wooden figure Niobe." For the first time she was mentioned by name in an official document and at the same time evacuated or rather incarcerated in that Stockturm in whose courtyard Paul Beneke had been drowned and from whose gallery I had first tried out my long-distance song effects. Intimidated perhaps by the presence of the choice products of human ingenuity of which I have spoken (for she was lodged in the torture chamber), she minded her business throughout the nineteenth century.

When in '25 I climbed to the top of the Stockturm and haunted the windows of the Stadt-Theater with my voice, Niobe, popularly known as "the Green Kitten," had long since and thank goodness been removed from the torture chamber of the tower. Who knows whether my attack on the neo-classical edifice would otherwise have succeeded?

It must have been an ignorant museum director, a foreigner to the city, who took Niobe from the torture chamber where her malice was held in check and, shortly after the founding of the Free City, settled her in the newly installed Maritime Museum. Shortly thereafter he died of blood poisoning, which this overzealous official had brought on himself while putting up a sign saying that the lady on exhibition above it was a figurehead answering to the name of Niobe. His successor, a cautious man familiar with the history of the city, wanted to have Niobe removed. His idea was to make the city of Lübeck a present of the dangerous wooden maiden, and it is only because the people of Lübeck declined the gift that the little city on the Trave, with the exception of its brick churches, came through the war and its air raids relatively unscathed.

And so Niobe, or "the Green Kitten," remained in the Maritime Museum and was responsible in the short space of fourteen years for the death of three directors—not the cautious one, he had got himself transferred—for the demise of an elderly priest at her feet, the violent ends of a student at the Engineering School, of two graduates of St. Peter's Secondary School who had just passed their final examinations, and the end of four conscientious museum attendants, three of whom were married. All, even the student of engineering, were found with transfigured countenances and in their breasts sharp objects of a kind to be found only in maritime museums: sailors' knives, boarding hooks, harpoons, finely chiseled spearheads from the Gold Coast, sail-makers' needles; only the last of the students had been

obliged to resort first to his pocketknife and then to his school compass, because shortly before his death all the sharp objects in the museum had been attached to chains or placed behind glass.

Although in every case the police as well as the coroner spoke of tragic suicide, a rumor which was current in the city and echoed in the newspapers had it that "The Green Kitten does it with her own hands." Niobe was seriously suspected of having dispatched men and boys from life to death. There was no end of discussion. The newspapers devoted special columns to their readers' opinions on the "Niobe case." The city government spoke of untimely superstition and said it had no intention whatsoever of taking precipitate action before definite proof was provided that something sinister and supernatural had actually occurred.

Thus the green statue remained the prize piece of the Maritime Museum, for the District Museum in Oliva, the Municipal Museum in Fleischergasse, and the management of the Artushof refused to accept the man-crazy individual within their walls.

There was a shortage of museum attendants. And the attendants were not alone in refusing to have anything to do with the wooden maiden. Visitors to the museum also avoided the room with the amber-eyed lady. For quite some time utter silence prevailed behind the Renaissance windows which provided the sculpture with the necessary lateral lighting. Dust piled up. The cleaning women stopped coming. As to the photographers, formerly so irrepressible, one of them died soon after taking Niobe's picture; a natural death, to be sure, but the man's colleagues had put two and two together. They ceased to furnish the press of the Free City, Poland, Germany, and even France with likenesses of the murderous figurehead, and even went so far as to expunge Niobe from their files. From then on their photographic efforts were devoted exclusively to the arrivals and departures of presidents, prime ministers, and exiled kings, to poultry shows, National Party Congresses, automobile races, and spring floods.

Such was the state of affairs when Herbert Truczinski, who no longer wished to be a waiter and was dead set against going into the customs service, donned the mouse-grey uniform of a museum attendant and took his place on a leather chair beside the door of the room popularly referred to as "the Kitten's parlor."

On the very first day of his job I followed Herbert to the streetcar stop on Max-Halbe-Platz. I was worried about him.

"Go home, Oskar, my boy. I can't take you with me." But I stood there so steadfast with my drum and drumsticks that Herbert relented: "Oh, all right. Come as far as the High Gate. And then you'll ride back again and be a good boy." At the High Gate I refused to take the Number 5 car that would have brought me home. Again Herbert relented; I could come as far as Heilige-Geist-Gasse. On the museum steps he tried again to get rid of me. Then with a sigh he bought a child's admission ticket. It is true that I was already fourteen and should have paid full admission, but what people don't know won't hurt them.

We had a pleasant, quiet day. No visitors, no inspectors. Now and then I would drum a little while; now and then Herbert would sleep for an hour or so. Niobe gazed out into the world through amber eyes and strove double-breasted toward a goal that was not our goal. We paid no attention to her. "She's not my type," said Herbert disparagingly. "Look at those rolls of fat, look at that double chin she's got."

He tilted his head and began to muse: "And look at the ass on her, like a family-size clothes cupboard. Herbert's taste runs more to dainty little ladies, cute and delicate like."

I listened to Herbert's detailed description of his type and looked on as his great shovel-like hands kneaded and modeled the contours of a lithe and lovely person of the fair sex, who was to remain for many years, to this very day as a matter of fact and even beneath the disguise of a nurse's uniform, my ideal of womanhood.

By the third day of our life in the museum we ventured to move away from the chair beside the door. On pretext of cleaning—the room really was in pretty bad shape—we made our way, dusting, sweeping away spiderwebs from the oak paneling, toward the sunlit and shadow-casting green wooden body. It would not be accurate to say that Niobe left us entirely cold. Her lures were heavy but not unshapely and she wasn't backward about putting them forward. But we did not look upon her with eyes of covetousness. Rather, we looked her over in the manner of shrewd connoisseurs who take every detail into account. Herbert and I were two esthetes soberly drunk on beauty, abstract beauty. There we were, studying feminine proportions with our thumbnails. Niobe's thighs were a bit too short; aside

from that we found that her lengthwise measurements—eight head lengths—lived up to the classical ideal; beamwise, however, pelvis, shoulders, and chest demanded to be judged by Dutch rather than Greek standards.

Herbert tilted his thumb: "She'd be a damn sight too active in bed for me. Herbert's had plenty of wrestling matches in Ohra and Fahrwasser. He don't need no woman for that." Herbert's fingers had been burnt. "Oh, if she was a little handful, a frail little thing that you've got to be careful not to break her in two, Herbert would have no objection."

Actually, if it had come to brass tacks, we should have had no objection either to Niobe and her wrestler's frame. Herbert was perfectly well aware that the degree of passivity or activity he liked or disliked in naked or half-clad women is not limited to the slender type to the exclusion of the buxom or stout; there are slim young things who can't lie still for a minute and women built like barrels who show no more current than a sleepy inland waterway. We purposely simplified, reducing the whole problem to two terms and insulting Niobe on principle. We were unforgivably rude to her. Herbert picked me up so I could beat her breasts with my drumsticks, driving absurd clouds of sawdust from her sprayed and therefore uninhabited wormholes. While I drummed, we looked into her amber eyes. Not a quiver or twinge, no sign of a tear. Her eyes did not narrow into menacing, hate-spewing slits. The whole room with everything in it was reflected perfectly though in convex distortion in those two polished, more yellowish than reddish drops of amber. Amber is deceptive, everyone knows that. We too were aware of the treacherous ways of this ennobled, ornamental wood gum. Nevertheless, obstinately classifying all things womanly as active and passive in our mechanical masculine way, we interpreted Niobe's apparent indifference in a manner favorable to ourselves. We felt safe. With a malignant cackle, Herbert drove a nail into her kneecap: my knee hurt at every stroke, she didn't even flick an eyelash. Right under her eyes, we engaged in all sorts of silly horseplay. Herbert put on the overcoat of a British admiral, took up a spyglass, and donned the admiral's hat that went with it. With a little red jacket and a full-bottomed wig I transformed myself into the admiral's pageboy. We played Trafalgar, bombarded Copenhagen, dispersed Napoleon's fleet at Aboukir, rounded this cape and that cape, took historical poses, and then again contemporary poses. All this beneath the eyes of Niobe,

the figurehead carved after the proportions of a Dutch witch. We were convinced that she looked on with indifference if she noticed us at all.

Today I know that everything watches, that nothing goes unseen, and that even wallpaper has a better memory than ours. It isn't God in His heaven that sees all. A kitchen chair, a coat-hanger, a half-filled ash tray, or the wooden replica of a woman named Niobe, can perfectly well serve as an unforgetting witness to every one of our acts.

We came to work in the Maritime Museum for two weeks or more. Herbert made me a present of a drum and twice brought Mother Truczinski home his weekly wages, which included a danger bonus. One Tuesday, for the museum was closed on Monday, the cashier refused to sell us a child's ticket; he refused to admit me altogether. Herbert asked why. Grumpily but not without benevolence, the cashier told us that a complaint had been made, that children could no longer be admitted; the little boy's father was against it; he didn't mind if I waited down by the ticket window, since he, as a businessman and widower, had no time to look after me, but he didn't want me in the Kitten's Parlor any more, because I was irresponsible.

Herbert was ready to give in, but I pushed him and prodded him. On the one hand he agreed that the cashier was right, on the other hand, he said I was his mascot, his guardian angel, my childlike innocence would protect him. In short, Herbert almost made friends with the cashier and succeeded in having me admitted "one last time", those were the cashier's words, to the Maritime Museum.

Once again my big friend took me by the hand and led me up the ornate, freshly oiled winding staircase to the second floor where Niobe lived. The morning was quiet and the afternoon still more so. Herbert sat with half-closed eyes on his leather chair with the yellow studs. I sat at his feet. My drum remained silent. We blinked up at the schooners, frigates, and corvettes, the fivemasters, galleons, and sloops, the coastal sailing vessels and clippers, all of them hanging from the oak paneling, waiting for a favorable wind. We mustered the model fleet, with it we waited for a fresh breeze and dreaded the calm prevailing in the parlor. All this we did to avoid having to look at and dread Niobe. What would we not have given for the work sounds of a wood worm, proof that the inside of the green wood was being slowly but surely eaten away and hollowed out, that Niobe was

perishable! But there wasn't a worm to be heard. The wooden body had been made immune to worms, immortal. Our only resource was the model fleet, the absurd hope for a favorable wind. We made a game out of our fear of Niobe, we did our very best to ignore it, to forget it, and we might even have succeeded if suddenly the afternoon sun had not struck her full in the left amber eye and set it aflame.

Yet this inflammation need not have surprised us. We were quite familiar with sunny afternoons on the second floor of the Maritime Museum, we knew what hour had struck or was about to strike when the light fell beneath the cornice and lit up the ships. The churches round about did their bit toward providing the dust-stirring movements of the sun's beam with a clock-time index, sending the sound of their historical bells to keep our historical objects company. Small wonder that the sun took on a historical character; it became an item in our museum and we began to suspect it of plotting with Niobe's amber eyes.

But that afternoon, disinclined as we were to games or provocative nonsense, Niobe's flaming eye struck us with redoubled force. Dejected and oppressed, we waited out the half-hour till closing time. The museum closed on the stroke of five.

Next day Herbert took up his post alone. I accompanied him to the museum, but I didn't feel like waiting by the ticket window; instead I found a place across the street. With my drum I sat on a granite sphere which had grown a tail that grownups used as a banister. Small need to say that the other side of the staircase was guarded by a similar sphere with a similar cast-iron tail. I drummed infrequently but then hideously loud, protesting against the passers-by, female for the most part, who seemed to take pleasure in stopping to talk with me, asking me my name, and running their sweaty hands through my hair, which though short was slightly wavy and already looked upon as attractive. The morning passed. At the end of Heilige-Geist-Gasse the red and black brick hen of green-steepled St. Mary's brooded beneath its great overgrown bell tower. Pigeons kept pushing one another out of nooks in the tower walls; alighting not far away from me, they would chatter together; what nonsense they talked; they hadn't the faintest idea how long the hen would go on brooding or what was going to hatch, or whether, after all these centuries, the brooding wasn't getting to be an end in itself.

At noon Herbert came out. From his lunchbox, which Mother Truczinski crammed so full that it couldn't be closed, he fished out a sandwich with a finger-thick slice of blood sausage and handed it to me. I didn't feel like eating. Herbert gave me a rather mechanical nod of encouragement. In the end I ate and Herbert, who did not, smoked a cigarette. Before returning to the museum, he went, with me tagging after him, to a bar in Brotbänken-Gasse for two or three drinks of gin. I watched his Adam's apple as he tipped up the glasses. I didn't like the way he was pouring it down. Long after he had mounted his winding staircase, long after I had returned to my granite sphere, Oskar could still see his friend Herbert's Adam's apple jumping up and down.

The afternoon crept across the pale polychrome façade of the museum. It sprang from cornice to cornice, rode nymphs and horns of plenty, devoured plump angels reaching for flowers, burst into the midst of a country carnival, played blindman's buff, mounted a swing festooned with roses, ennobled a group of burghers talking business in baggy breeches, lit upon a stag pursued by hounds, and finally reached the second-story window which allowed the sun, briefly and yet forever, to illuminate an amber eye.

Slowly I slid off my granite ball. My drum struck hard against the stone. Some bits of lacquer from the white casing and the red flames broke off and lay white and red on the stone steps.

Possibly I recited something, perhaps I mumbled a prayer, or a list: a little while later the ambulance drew up in front of the museum. Passers-by gathered round the entrance. Oskar managed to slip in with the men from the emergency squad. I found my way up the stairs quicker than they, though by that time they must have begun to know their way around the museum.

It was all I could do to keep from laughing when I saw Herbert. He was hanging from Niobe's façade, he had tried to jump her. His head covered hers. His arms clung to her upraised, folded arms. He was bare to the waist. His shirt was found later, neatly folded on the leather chair beside the door. His back disclosed all its scars. I read the script, counted the letters. Not a one was missing. But not so much as the beginning of a new inscription was discernible.

The emergency squad who came rushing in not far behind me had difficulty in getting Herbert away from Niobe. In a frenzy of lust he had torn a double-edged ship's ax from

its safety chain; one edge he had driven into Niobe and the other, in the course of his frantic assault, into himself. Up top, then, they were perfectly united, but down below, alas, he had found no ground for his anchor and his member still emerged, stiff and perplexed, from his open trousers.

When they spread the blanket with the inscription "Municipal Emergency Service" over Herbert, Oskar, as always when he incurred a loss, found his way back to his drum. He was still beating it with his fists when the museum guards led him out of "the Kitten's Parlor", down the stairs, and ultimately stowed him in a police car that took him home.

Even now, in the mental hospital, when he recalls this attempted love affair between flesh and wood, he is constrained to work with his fists in order to explore once more Herbert's swollen, multicolored back, that hard and sensitive labyrinth of scars which was to foreshadow, to anticipate everything to come, which was harder and more sensitive than anything that followed. Like a blind man he read the raised script of that back.

It is only now, now that they have taken Herbert away from his unfeeling carving, that Bruno my keeper turns up with that awful pear-shaped head of his. Gently he removes my fists from the drum, hangs the drum over the left-hand bedpost at the foot end of my iron bed, and smoothes out my blanket.

"Why, Mr. Matzerath," he reproves me gently, "if you go on drumming so loud, somebody's bound to hear that somebody's drumming much too loud. Wouldn't you like to take a rest or drum a little softer?"

Yes, Bruno, I shall try to dictate a quieter chapter to my drum, even though the subject of my next chapter calls for an orchestra of ravenous wild men.

Faith, Hope, Love

THERE WAS ONCE a musician; his name was Meyn and he played the trumpet too beautifully for words. He lived on the fifth floor of an apartment house, just under the roof, he kept four cats, one of which was called Bismarck, and from morning to night he drank out of a gin bottle. This he did until sobered by disaster.

Even today Oskar doesn't like to believe in omens. But I have to admit that in those days there were plenty of omens of disaster. It was approaching with longer and longer steps and larger and larger boots. It was then that my friend Herbert Truczinski died of a wound in the chest inflicted by a wooden woman. The woman did not die. She was sealed up in the cellar of the museum, allegedly to be restored, preserved in any case. But you can't lock up disaster in a cellar. It drains into the sewer pipes, spreads to the gas pipes, and gets into every household with the gas. And no one who sets his soup kettle on the bluish flames suspects that disaster is bringing his supper to a boil.

When Herbert was buried in Langfuhr Cemetery, I once again saw Leo Schugger, whose acquaintance I had made at Brenntau. Slaving and holding out his white mildewed gloves, he tendered his sympathies, those sympathies of his which made little distinction between joy and sorrow, to all the assembled company, to Mother Truczinski, to Guste, Fritz, and Maria Truczinski, to the corpulent Mrs. Kater, to old man Heilandt, who slaughtered Fritz' rabbits for Mother Truczinski on holidays, to my presumptive father Matzerath, who, generous as he could be at times, defrayed a good half of the funeral expenses, even to Jan Bronski, who hardly knew Herbert and had only come to see Matzerath and perhaps myself on neutral cemetery ground.

When Leo Schugger's gloves fluttered out toward Meyn the musician, who had come half in civilian dress, half in SA uniform, another omen of disaster befell.

Suddenly frightened, Leo's pale glove darted upward and flew off, drawing Leo with it over the tombs. He could

be heard screaming and the tatters of words that hovered in the cemetery air had no connection with condolences.

No one moved away from Meyn the musician. And yet, recognized and singled out by Leo Schugger, he stood alone amid the funeral company. He fiddled embarrassedly with his trumpet, which he had brought along by design and had played beautifully over Herbert's grave. Beautifully, because Meyn had done what he hadn't done for a long time, he had gone back to his gin bottle, because he was the same age as Herbert and Herbert's death, which reduced me and my drum to silence, had moved him.

There was once a musician; his name was Meyn, and he played the trumpet too beautifully for words. He lived on the fifth floor of an apartment house, just under the roof; he kept four cats, one of which was called Bismarck, and from morning to night he drank out of a gin bottle until, late in '36 or early in '37 I think it was, he joined the Mounted SA. As a trumpeter in the band, he made far fewer mistakes but his playing was no longer too beautiful for words, because, when he slipped on those riding breeches with the leather seat, he gave up the gin bottle and from then on his playing was loud and sober, nothing more.

When SA Man Meyn lost his long-time friend Herbert Truczinski, along with whom during the twenties he had paid dues first to a communist youth group, then to the socialist Red Falcons; when it came time for his friend to be laid in the ground, Meyn reached for his trumpet and his gin bottle. For he wanted to play beautifully and not soberly; his days in the equestrian band hadn't destroyed his ear for music. Arrived at the cemetery, he took a last swig, and while playing he kept his civilian coat on over his uniform, although he had planned to play in Brown, minus the cap, of course.

There was once an SA man who, while playing the trumpet too beautifully for words after drinking plenty of gin, kept his overcoat on over his Mounted SA uniform. When Leo Schugger, a type met with in all cemeteries, came forward to offer condolences, everyone else came in for his share of sympathy. Only the SA man was not privileged to grasp Leo's white glove, because Leo, recognizing the SA man, gave a loud cry of fear and withheld both his glove and his sympathies. The SA man went home with a cold trumpet and no sympathy. In his flat under the roof of our apartment house he found his four cats.

There was once an SA man, his name was Meyn. As a relic of the days when he drank gin all day and played the trumpet too beautifully for words, Meyn still kept four cats, one of which was called Bismarck. One day when SA Man Meyn came home from the funeral of his old friend Herbert Truczinski, sad and sobered, because someone had withheld his sympathies, he found himself all alone in the flat with his four cats. The cats rubbed against his riding boots, and Meyn gave them a newspaper full of herring heads. That got them away from his boots. That day the flat stank worse than usual of the four cats who were all toms, one of which was called Bismarck and was black with white paws. But Meyn had no gin on hand and that made the stench of the cats more unacceptable. He might have bought some gin in our store if his flat hadn't been on the fifth floor, right under the roof. But as it was, he dreaded the stairs and still more he dreaded the neighbors in whose presence and hearing he had sworn on numerous occasions that never again would a drop of gin cross his musician's lips, that he had embarked on a new life of rigorous sobriety, that from now on his motto was order and purpose, away with the vapors of a botched and aimless youth.

There was once a man, his name was Meyn. One day when he found himself all alone in his flat under the roof with his four tomcats, one of which was called Bismarck, the smell was most particularly distasteful to him, because he had had an unpleasant experience earlier in the day and also because there was no gin on hand. When his thirst and displeasure and with them the cat smell had reached a certain point, Meyn, a musician by trade and a member of the Mounted SA band, reached for the poker that was leaning against the cold stove and flailed out at the cats until it seemed safe to assume that though the cat smell in the flat had lost none of its pungency, all of them, including the one named Bismarck, were dead and done for.

Once there was a watchmaker named Laubschad who lived on the second floor of our apartment house in a two-room flat, with windows overlooking the court. Laubschad the watchmaker was unmarried, a member of the National Socialist Welfare Organization and of the SPCA. He was a kindly man who liked to help all tired humans, sick animals, and broken clocks back on their feet. One afternoon as the watchmaker sat pensively at his window, thinking about the neighbor's funeral he had attended that morning, he saw

Meyn the musician, who lived on the fifth floor of the same building, carry a half-filled potato sack, which was dripping and seemed wet at the bottom, out into the court and plunge it into one of the garbage cans. But since the garbage can was already three-quarters full, the musician had trouble getting the lid back on.

There were once four tomcats, one of which was called Bismarck. These tomcats belonged to a musician by the name of Meyn. Since the tomcats, which had not been fixed, emitted a fierce, uncompromising smell, the musician clouted them with a fire poker one day when for particular reasons he found the smell particularly distasteful, stuffed their remains in a potato sack, carried the sack down four flights of stairs, and was in a great hurry to stow the bundle in the garbage can in the court beside the carpet rack, because the burlap was not water- nor bloodproof and began to drip before he was even half down the stairs. But since the garbage can was a bit full, the musician had to compress the garbage and his sack in order to close the lid. No sooner had he left the court in the direction of the street—for he had no desire to go back to his flat which though catless still stank of cats—than the compressed garbage began to expand, raised the sack, and with it the lid of the garbage can.

Once there was a musician, he slew his four cats, buried them in a garbage can, left the house, and went out to visit friends.

There was once a watchmaker who sat pensively by his window, looking on as Meyn the musician stuffed a half-filled sack in the garbage can and quickly left the court. A few moments after Meyn's departure, he saw the lid of the garbage can beginning to rise and slowly go on rising.

There were once four tomcats; because they smelled particularly strong on a certain particular day, they were knocked dead, stuffed into a sack, and buried in a garbage can. But the cats, one of which was called Bismarck, were not quite dead; they were tough customers, as cats tend to be. They moved in the sack, set the lid of the garbage can in motion, and confronted Laubschad the watchmaker, who still sat pensively at the window, with the question: what can there be in the sack that Meyn the musician threw in the garbage can?

There was once a watchmaker who could not look on with indifference while something was moving in a garbage can.

He left his flat on the second floor, went down into the court, lifted up the lid of the garbage can, opened the sack, took the four badly damaged but still living tomcats home with him, and cared for them. But they died the following night under his watchmaker's fingers. This left him no other course than to enter a complaint with the SPCA, of which he was a member, and to inform the local Party headquarters of a case of cruelty to animals which could only impair the Party's reputation.

There was once an SA man who did four cats in with a poker. But because the cats were not all-the-way dead, they gave him away and a watchmaker reported him. The case came up for trial and the SA man had to pay a fine. But the matter was also discussed in the SA and the SA man was expelled from the SA for conduct unbecoming a storm trooper. Even his conspicuous bravery on the night of November 8, which later became known as Crystal Night, when he helped set fire to the Langfuhr synagogue in Michaelisweg, even his meritorious activity the following morning when a number of stores, carefully designated in advance, were closed down for the good of the nation, could not halt his expulsion from the Mounted SA. For inhuman cruelty to animals he was stricken from the membership list. It was not until a year later that he gained admittance to the Home Guard, which was later incorporated in the Waffen SS.

There was once a grocer who closed his store one day in November, because something was doing in town; taking his son Oskar by the hand, he boarded a Number 5 streetcar and rode to the Langasser Gate, because there as in Zoppot and Langfuhr the synagogue was on fire. The synagogue had almost burned down and the firemen were looking on, taking care that the flames should not spread to other buildings. Outside the wrecked synagogue, men in uniform and others in civilian clothes piled up books, ritual objects, and strange kinds of cloth. The mound was set on fire and the grocer took advantage of the opportunity to warm his fingers and his feelings over the public blaze. But his son Oskar, seeing his father so occupied and inflamed, slipped away unobserved and hurried off in the direction of Arsenal Passage, because he was worried about his tin drums with their red and white lacquer.

There was once a toystore owner; his name was Sigismund Markus and among other things he sold tin drums

lacquered red and white. Oskar, above-mentioned, was the principal taker of these drums, because he was a drummer by profession and was neither able nor willing to live without a drum. For this reason he hurried away from the burning synagogue in the direction of Arsenal Passage, for there dwelt the keeper of his drums; but he found him in a state which forever after made it impossible for him to sell tin drums in this world.

They, the same firemen whom I, Oskar, thought I had escaped; had visited Markus before me; dipping a brush in paint, they had written "Jewish Sow" obliquely across his window in Sütterlin script; then, perhaps disgusted with their own handwriting, they had kicked in the window with the heels of their boots, so that the epithet they had fastened on Markus could only be guessed at. Scorning the door, they had entered the shop through the broken window and there, in their characteristic way, they were playing with the toys.

I found them still at play when I, also through the window, entered the shop. Some had taken their pants down and had deposited brown sausages, in which half-digested peas were still discernible, on sailing vessels, fiddling monkeys, and on my drums. They all looked like Meyn the musician, they wore Meyn's SA uniform, but Meyn was not there; just as the ones who were there were not somewhere else. One had drawn his dagger. He was cutting dolls open and he seemed disappointed each time that nothing but sawdust flowed from their limbs and bodies.

I was worried about my drums. They didn't like my drums. My own drum couldn't stand up to their rage; there was nothing it could do but bow down and keep quiet. But Markus had escaped from their rage. When they went to see him in his office, they did not knock, they broke the door open, although it was not locked.

The toy merchant sat behind his desk. As usual he had on sleeve protectors over his dark-grey everyday jacket. Dandruff on his shoulders showed that his scalp was in bad shape. One of the SA men with puppets on his fingers poked him with Kasperl's wooden grandmother, but Markus was beyond being spoken to, beyond being hurt or humiliated. Before him on the desk stood an empty water glass; the sound of his crashing shopwindow had made him thirsty no doubt.

There was once a drummer, his name was Oskar. When they took away his toy merchant and ransacked the shop,

But after faith in Santa Claus had turned out to be faith in the gasman, an attempt was made, in disregard of the order set forth in Corinthians, to do it with love: I love you, they said, oh, I love you. Do you, too, love yourself? Do you love me, say, do you really love me? I love myself too. And from sheer love they called each other radishes, they loved radishes, they bit into each other, out of sheer love one radish bit off another's radish. And they told one another stories about wonderful heavenly love, and earthly love too, between radishes, and just before biting, they whispered to one another, whispered with all the sharp freshness of hunger: Radish, say, do you love me? I love myself too.

But after they had bitten off each other's radishes out of love, and faith in the gasman had been proclaimed the state religion, there remained, after faith and anticipated love, only the third white elephant of the Epistle to the Corinthians: hope. And even while they still had radishes, walnuts, and almonds to nibble on, they began to hope that soon it would be over, so they might begin afresh or continue, hoping after or even during the finale that the end would soon be over. The end of what? They still did not know. They only hoped that it would soon be over, over tomorrow, but not today; for what were they to do if the end came so suddenly? And then when the end came, they quickly turned it into a hopeful beginning; for in our country the end is always the beginning and there is hope in every, even the most final, end. And so too is it written: As long as man hopes, he will go on turning out hopeful finales.

For my part, I don't know. I don't know, for example, who it is nowadays that hides under the beards of the Santa Clauses, nor what Santa Claus has in his sack; I don't know how gas cocks are throttled and shut off; for Advent, the time of longing for a Redeemer, is flowing again, or flowing still, I do not know. Another thing I don't know is whether I can believe that, as I hope, they are polishing the gas cocks lovingly, so as to make them crow, what morning, what evening, I don't know, nor know I whether the time of day matters; for love knows no time of day, and hope is without end, and faith knows no limits, only knowing and not knowing are subject to times and limits and usually end before their time with beards, knapsacks, almonds, so that once again I must say: I know not, oh, I know not, for example, what they fill sausage casings with, whose guts are fit to be filled, nor do I know with what, though the prices

book two

Scrap Metal

VISITING DAY: MARIA has brought me a new drum. After passing it over the bars enclosing my bed, she wished to give me the sales slip from the store, but I waved it away and pressed the bell button at the head end of the bed until Bruno my keeper came in and did what he always does when Maria brings me a new drum. He undid the string, let the blue wrapping paper open of its own accord, solemnly lifted out the drum, and carefully folded the paper. Only then did he stride—and when I say stride, I mean stride—to the washbasin with the new drum, turn on the hot water, and, taking care not to scratch the red and white lacquer, remove the price tag.

When, after a brief, not too fatiguing visit, Maria prepared to go, she picked up the old drum, which I had pretty well wrecked during my saga of Herbert Truczinski's back, my stories about the figurehead, and my perhaps rather arbitrary interpretation of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. She was going to take it home to store in our cellar, side by side with all the other worn-out instruments that had served my professional or private purposes. "There's not much room left in the cellar," she said with a sigh. "I'd like to know where I'm going to put the winter potatoes."

I smiled, pretending not to hear this plaint of the housekeeper in Maria, and gave her my instructions: the retired drum must be numbered in black ink and the brief notes I had made on a slip of paper about the drum's career must be transferred to the diary which has been hanging for years on the inside of the cellar door and knows all about my drums since 1949.

edges and, running home with my treasures, imagined that I was secure against hard times.

I was very careful with my drums, I drummed seldom and only in cases of absolute necessity; I denied myself whole afternoons of drumming and, very reluctantly, the drumming at breakfast time that had hitherto made my days bearable. Oskar had turned ascetic; he lost weight and was taken to see Dr. Hollatz and Sister Inge, his assistant, who was getting steadily bonier. They gave me sweet, sour, bitter, and tasteless medicine and put the blame on my glands, which in Dr. Hollatz' opinion had upset my constitution by alternating between hyperfunction and hypofunction.

To escape from Dr. Hollatz' clutches, Oskar moderated his asceticism and put on weight. By the summer of '39, he was his old three-year-old self again, but in filling out his cheeks he had irrevocably demolished the last of Markus' drums. The object that hung on my belly was a pitiful wreck, rusty and full of gaping holes; the red and white lacquer was nearly gone and the sound was utterly lugubrious.

There was no point in appealing to Matzerath for help, though he was a helpful soul and even kindly in his way. Since my poor mother's death, he thought of nothing but his Party occupations; when in need of distraction, he would confer with other unit leaders. Or toward midnight, after ample consumption of spirits, he would carry on loud though confidential conversations with the black-framed likenesses of Hitler and Beethoven in our living room, the genius speaking to him of destiny and the Führer of providence. When he was sober he looked upon the collecting of Winter Aid as the destiny allotted him by providence.

I don't like to think about those collection Sundays. It was on one of them that I made a futile attempt to possess myself of a new drum. Matzerath, who had spent the morning collecting outside the Art Cinema in Hauptstrasse and Sternfeld's Department Store, came home at noon and warmed up some meatballs for our lunch. After the meal—I can still remember that it was very tasty—the weary collector lay down on the couch for a nap. No sooner did his breathing suggest sleep than I took the half-full collection box from the piano and disappeared into the store. Huddled under the counter, I turned my attention to this most preposterous of all tin cans. Not that I intended to filch so much as a penny. My absurd idea was to try the thing out as a drum. But however I beat, however I manipulated the sticks it

gave but one answer: Winter Aid, please contribute. Let no one be cold or hungry. Winter Aid, please contribute.

After half an hour I gave up; I took five pfennings from the cash drawer, contributed them to the Winter Aid, and returned the collection box thus enriched to the piano, so that Matzerath might find it and kill the rest of his Sunday shaking it for the cold and hungry.

This unsuccessful attempt cured me forever. Never again did I seriously attempt to use a tin can, an overturned bucket, or the bottom of a washbasin for a drum. If I nevertheless did so from time to time, I try my best to forget these inglorious episodes, and give them as little space as possible on this paper. A tin can is simply not a drum, a bucket is a bucket, and a washbasin is good for washing yourself or your socks. There was no more substitute then than there is now; a tin drum adorned with red flames on a white field speaks for itself and no one can speak for it.

Oskar was alone, betrayed and sold down the river. How was he to preserve his three-year-old countenance if he lacked what was most necessary to his well-being, his drum? All the deceptions I had been practicing for years: my occasional bed-wetting, my childlike babbling of evening prayers, my fear of Santa Claus, whose real name was Greff, my indefatigable asking of droll, typically three-year-old questions such as: Why have cars got wheels?—all this nonsense that grownups expected of me I now had to provide without my drum. I was soon tempted to give up. In my despair I began to look for the man who was not my father but had very probably begotten me. Not far from the Polish settlement on Ringstrasse, Oskar waited for Jan Bronski.

My poor mama's death had put an end to the relations, sometimes verging on friendship, between Matzerath and my uncle, who had meanwhile been promoted to the position of postal secretary. There was no sudden break, but despite the memories they shared, they had gradually moved apart as the political crisis deepened. The disintegration of my mama's slender soul and ample body brought with it the disintegration of the friendship between these two men, both of whom had mirrored themselves in her soul and fed on her body. Deprived of this nourishment and convex mirror, they found no substitute but their meetings with men who were dedicated to opposing political ideas though they smoked the same tobacco. But neither a Polish Post Office nor meetings with unit leaders in shirtsleeves can take the place of a

beautiful, tender-hearted woman. Despite the need for caution—Matzerath had to think of his customers and the Party and Jan had the postal administration to consider—my two presumptive fathers met several times between my poor mama's death and the end of Sigismund Markus.

Two or three times a month, toward midnight, we would hear Jan's knuckles tapping on our living room window. Matzerath would push the curtain aside and open the window a crack; both of them would be thoroughly embarrassed until one or the other found the saving word and suggested a game of midnight skat. They would summon Greff from his vegetable store or, if he was disinclined, which he often was on Jan's account, because as a former scout leader—he had meanwhile disbanded his troop—he had to be careful and besides he was a poor player and didn't care much about skat in the first place, they usually called in Alexander Scheffler, the baker, as third. Scheffler himself was none too enthusiastic about sitting at the same table with Jan, but a certain affection for my poor mama, which had transferred itself like a kind of legacy to Matzerath, and a firm conviction that retailers should stick together, induced the short-legged baker to hurry over from Kleinhammer-Weg in response to Matzerath's call, to take his place at our living room table, to shuffle the cards with his pale, worm-eaten, floury fingers and distribute them like rolls to the hungry multitude.

Since these forbidden games did not as a rule begin until midnight, to break off at three in the morning when Scheffler was needed in the bakery, it was only on rare occasions that I managed to rise from my bed unseen, unheard, and drumless, and slip into the shady corner beneath the table.

As you have doubtless noticed by now, I had always, under tables, been given to the easiest kind of meditation: I made comparisons. How things had changed since my poor mama's death. No longer did Jan Bronski, cautious up top and yet losing game after game, but intrepid below, send out his shoeless sock on expeditions between my mother's thighs. Sex, not to say love, had vanished from the skat table. Six trouser legs in various fish-bone patterns draped six masculine legs, some bare and more or less hairy at the ankles, others affecting long underwear. Down below, all six made every effort to avoid the slightest contact, however fortuitous, while up above their extensions—trunks, heads, arms—busied themselves with a game which should have been forbidden on political grounds, for every hand lost or won

admitted of such baleful or triumphant reflections as: Poland has lost a grand hand, or, the Free City of Danzig has taken a diamond single for the German Reich.

It was not hard to foresee a day when these war games would come to an end, transformed, as is the way with war games, into hard realities.

Early in the summer of '39 it became clear that Matzerath, in the course of his weekly Party conferences, had found skat partners less compromising than Polish postal officials and former scout leaders. Jan Bronski remembered—he was forced to remember—the camp to which fate had assigned him; he began to stick to his post-office friends, such as Kobyella, the crippled janitor who, since his service in Marszałek Piłsudski's legendary legion, had one leg an inch or more shorter than the other. Despite his limp, Kobyella was an excellent janitor, hence a skillful repair man who might, it seemed to me, be kind enough to make my sick drum well again. The path to Kobyella led through Jan Bronski. That was the only reason why I took to waiting for Jan near the Polish settlement toward six in the evening. Even in the most stifling August heat I waited, but Jan, who normally started punctually for home at closing time, did not appear. Without explicitly asking myself what does your presumptive father do after work? I often waited until seven or half-past. And still he did not come. I could have gone to Aunt Hedwig's. Possibly Jan was sick; maybe he had fever or he had broken a leg and had it in plaster. Oskar stayed right where he was and contented himself with staring from time to time at the windows and curtains of the postal secretary's flat. Oskar felt a strange reluctance about visiting his Aunt Hedwig, whose motherly cow's eye made him sad. Besides, he was not especially fond of the Bronski children, his presumptive half brother and sister. They treated him like a doll. They wanted to play with him, to use him for a toy. What right had Stephan, who was just fifteen, scarcely older than himself, to treat him with the condescension of a father or schoolmaster? And ten-year-old Marga with those braids and that face that rose like a fat full moon, what gave her the right to look upon Oskar as a dummy to be dressed, combed, brushed, adjusted, and lectured at by the hour? To both of them I was nothing but a freak, a pathetic midget, while they were normal and full of promise. They were also my grandma Koljaiczek's favorites, but then I had to own that I made things pretty hard for her. I showed little interest

in fairy tales and picture books. What I expected of my grandmother, what even today I dream of in the most pleasurable detail, was very clear and simple, and for that reason hard to obtain: the moment he saw her, Oskar wanted to emulate his grandfather Koljaiczek, to take refuge beneath her skirts and, if possible, never again draw a breath outside of their sheltering stillness.

What lengths I went to to gain admittance to that tent! I don't believe that she actually disliked to have Oskar sitting there. But she hesitated and usually refused me; I think she would gladly have granted refuge to anyone who halfway resembled Koljaiczek; it was only I who, having neither his build nor his ready hand with matches, was constrained to think up stratagems.

I can see Oskar playing with a rubber ball like a real three-year-old; by pure chance the ball rolls under her skirts and Oskar, in pursuit of the spherical pretext, slips in before his grandmother can see through his ruse and give back the ball.

When the grownups were present, my grandmother never tolerated me under her skirts for very long. The grownups would make fun of her, reminding her, often in rather crude terms, of her betrothal in the autumnal potato fields, until my grandmother, who was not pale by nature, would blush loud and long, which was not unbecoming to her with her hair which by then—she was past sixty—was almost white.

But when my grandmother Anna was alone—as she seldom was, and I saw her more and more rarely after my poor mama's death, and scarcely ever since she had been obliged to give up her stall at the weekly market in Langfuhr—she was more willing to let me take shelter beneath her potato-colored skirts and let me stay longer. I didn't even need the silly trick with the rubber ball. Sliding across the floor with my drum, doubling up one leg and bracing the other against the furniture, I made my way toward the grandmotherly mountain; arrived at the foot, I would raise the fourfold veils with my drumsticks and, once underneath, let them fall, all four at once. For a moment I remained perfectly still, breathing in with my whole soul the acrid smell of slightly rancid butter, which, unaffected by the changing of the seasons, pervaded this chosen habitat. Only then did Oskar begin to drum. Knowing what his grandmother liked to hear, I called forth sounds of October rain, similar to what she must have heard by the smouldering potato plants,

when Koljaiczek, smelling like a hotly pursued firebug, came to her for shelter. I would make a fine slanting rain fall on the drum, until above me I could hear sighs and saints' names, and it is up to you to recognize the sighs and saints' names that were uttered in '99 when my grandmother sat in the rain and Koljaiczek sat dry in the tent.

As I waited for Jan Bronski outside the Polish settlement in August, '39, I often thought of my grandmother. Possibly she was visiting with Aunt Hedwig. But alluring as the thought may have been to sit beneath her skirts, breathing in the smell of rancid butter, I did not climb the two flights of stairs, I did not ring the bell under the name plate marked "Jan Bronski." What had Oskar to offer his grandmother? His drum was broken, it made no music, it had forgotten the sound of the rain, the fine rain that falls aslant on a fire of potato plants. And since these autumnal sound effects were his only way of appealing to his grandmother, he stayed out on Ringstrasse, gazing at the Number 5 cars as they approached or receded, clanging their bells in their course along the Heeresanger.

Was I still waiting for Jan? Had I not already given up? If I was still standing on the same spot, was it not simply that I had not yet thought up an acceptable way of leaving? Long waiting can be quite educational. But a long wait can also make one conjure up the awaited encounter in such detail as to destroy all possibility of a happy surprise. Nevertheless Jan surprised me. Resolved to take him unawares, to serenade him with the remains of my drum, I stood there tense, with my sticks at the ready. If only the groans and outcries of my drum could make my desperate situation clear to him, there would be no need of any long-winded explanations. Five more streetcars, I said to myself, three more, just this one; giving shape to my anxieties, I imagined that the Bronskis, at Jan's request, had been transferred to Modlin or Warsaw; I saw him as postmaster in Bromberg or Thorn. Then, in disregard of all my promises to myself, I waited for one more streetcar, and had already turned to start for home when Oskar was seized from behind. A grown-up had put his hands over Oskar's eyes.

I felt soft hands that smelled of expensive soap, pleasantly dry, men's hands; I felt Jan Bronski.

When he let me loose and spun me round toward him with an overloud laugh, it was too late to demonstrate my disastrous situation on the drum. Consequently I inserted both

drumsticks under the linen suspenders of my filthy knickers, filthy and frayed around the pockets because in those days there was no one to take care of me. That left my hands free to lift up my drum, to raise it high in accusation, as Father Wiehnke raised the host during Mass, I too might have said: this is my body and blood, but I said not a word; I just held up the battered metal. I desired no fundamental or miraculous transubstantiation; all I wanted for my drum was a repair job, nothing more.

Jan's laughter was plainly hysterical. He must have felt it to be out of place for he stopped it at once. He saw my drum, he couldn't very well help it, but soon turned away from it to seek my bright, three-year-old eyes, which at that time still had a look of candor. At first he saw nothing but two expressionless blue irises full of glints and reflections, everything in short that eyes are said to be full of, and then, forced to admit that the reflections in my eyes were no better or worse than those that can be seen in any first-class puddle, summoned up all his good will, concentrated his memory, and forced himself to find in my orbits my mama's grey, but similarly shaped eyes which for quite a few years had reflected sentiments ranging from benevolence to passion for his benefit. Perhaps he was disconcerted to find a shadow of himself, though this would not necessarily mean that Jan was my father or, more accurately, my begetter. For his eyes, Mama's, and my own were distinguished by the same naïvely shrewd, sparkling, inept beauty as those of nearly all the Bronskis, of Stephan, of Marga, though in lesser degree, but above all of my grandmother and her brother Vincent. Yet despite my blue eyes and black lashes, there was no overlooking a dash of incendiary Koljaiczek blood in me—how else account for my delight in shattering glass with song?—whereas it would have been hard to discern any Rhenish, Matzerath traits in me.

At that moment, when I lifted my drum and put my eyes to work, Jan himself, who preferred to sidestep such questions, would, if asked directly, have had to confess: it is his mother Agnes who is looking at me. Or perhaps I am looking at myself. His mother and I had far too much in common. But then again it might be my uncle Koljaiczek, who is in America or on the bottom of the sea. In any case it is not Matzerath who is looking at me, and that is just as well.

Jan took my drum, turned it about, tapped it. He, the impractical butterfingers, who couldn't even sharpen a pencil

properly, assumed the air of a man who knows something about repairing tin drums. Visibly making a decision, which was rare with him, he took me by the hand, quite to my surprise because I had never expected things to move that quickly, and led me across Ringstrasse to the Heeresanger street-car stop. When the car came, he pulled me after him into the trailer where smoking was permitted.

As Oskar suspected, we were going into the city, to the Hevelius-Platz, to the Polish Post Office, to see Janitor Kobyella, who possessed the tools and the skill that Oskar's drum was so sorely in need of.

That streetcar ride in the jingling, jangling Number 5 might have been a quiet pleasure jaunt if it had not taken place on the day before September 1, 1939. At Max-Halbe-Platz, the car filled up with weary but vociferous bathers from the beach at Brösen. What a pleasant summer evening would have awaited us, drinking soda pop through a straw at the Café Weitzke after depositing the drum, if the battle-ships *Schleswig* and *Schleswig-Holstein* had not been riding at anchor in the harbor mouth across from the Westerplatte, displaying their grim steel flanks, their double revolving turrets, and casemate guns. How lovely it would have been to ring at the porter's lodge of the Polish Post Office and leave an innocent child's drum for Janitor Kobyella to repair, if only the post office had not, in the course of the last few months, been fitted out with armor plate and turned into a fortress garrisoned by the hitherto peace-loving post-office personnel, officials, clerks, and mail carriers, who had been devoting their weekends to military training at Gdingen and Oxhöft.

We were approaching Oliva Gate. Jan Bronski was sweating profusely, staring at the dusty green trees of Hindenburg-Allee and smoking more of his gold-tipped cigarettes than his economical nature would ordinarily have permitted. Oskar had never seen his presumptive father sweat so, except for two or three times when he had watched him on the sofa with his mama.

But my poor mama had long been dead. Why was Jan Bronski sweating? When I saw how he prepared to leave the car at every approaching stop but each time remembered my presence at the last moment, when I realized that if he resumed his seat it was because of me and my drum, I knew why he was sweating. It was because Jan, as an official, was expected to help defend the Polish Post Office. He had al-

ready made his getaway, but then he had run into me and my scrap metal on the corner of Ringstrasse and the Heeresanger, and resolved to follow the call of duty. Pulling me, who was neither an official nor fit to defend a post office, after him, he had boarded the car and here he sat smoking and sweating. Why didn't he get out? I certainly would not have stopped him. He was still in the prime of life, not yet forty-five, blue of eye and brown of hair. His trembling hands were well manicured, and if he hadn't been perspiring so pitifully, the smell that came to Oskar's nostrils as he sat beside his presumptive father would have been cologne and not cold sweat.

At the Holzmarkt we got out and walked down the Alstädtischer Graben. It was a still summer night. The bells pealed heavenward as they always did toward eight o'clock, sending up clouds of pigeons. "Be True and Upright to the Grave," sang the chimes. It was beautiful and made you want to cry. But all about us there was laughter. Women with sunburned children, terry-cloth beach robes, bright-colored balls and sailboats alit from the streetcars bearing their freshly bathed multitudes from the beaches of Glettkau and Heubude. Girls still drowsy from the sun nibbled raspberry ice. A fifteen-year-old dropped her ice cream cone and was about to pick it up, but then she hesitated and finally abandoned the rapidly melting delicacy to the paving stones and the shoe soles of future passers-by; soon she would be a grownup and stop eating ice cream in the street.

At Schneidermühlen-Gasse we turned left. The Hevelius-Platz, to which the little street led, was blocked off by SS Home Guards standing about in groups: youngsters and grown men with the armbands and rifles of the security police. It would have been easy to make a detour around the cordon and get to the post office from the Rähm. Jan Bronski went straight up to the SS men. His purpose was clear: he wanted to be stopped under the eyes of his superiors, who were certainly having the Hevelius-Platz watched from the post office, and sent back. He hoped to cut a relatively dignified figure as a thwarted hero and return home by the same Number 5 streetcar that had brought him.

The Home Guards let us through; it probably never occurred to them that this well-dressed gentleman leading a three-year-old child by the hand meant to go to the post office. They politely advised us to be careful and did not

shout "Halt" until we were through the outside gate and approaching the main entrance. Jan turned irresolutely. The heavy door was opened a crack and we were pulled inside: there we were in the pleasantly cool half-light of the main hall.

The greeting Jan Bronski received from his colleagues was not exactly friendly. They distrusted him, they had probably given him up. Some, as they declared quite frankly, had even begun to suspect that he, Postal Secretary Bronski, was going to *shirk his duties*. Jan had difficulty in clearing himself. No one listened. He was pushed into a line of men who were busy hauling sandbags up from the cellar. These sandbags and other incongruous objects were piled up behind the plate-glass windows; filing cabinets and other items of heavy furniture were moved close to the main entrance with a view to barricading it in case of emergency.

Someone asked who I was but had no time to wait for Jan's answer. The men were nervous; they would shout at one another and then suddenly, grown overcautious, start whispering. My drum and its distress seemed forgotten. Kobyella the janitor, on whom I had counted, whom I expected to rehabilitate the mass of scrap metal hanging from my neck, was not to be seen: he was probably on the second or third floor of the building, feverishly at work like the clerks and postmen around me, piling up sandbags that were supposed to resist bullets. Oskar's presence was obviously embarrassing to Bronski. The moment a man, whom the others called Dr. Michon, came up to give Jan instructions I slipped away. After cautiously circumnavigating this Dr. Michon, who wore a Polish steel helmet and was obviously the postmaster, I looked about and finally found the stairs leading to the second floor. Toward the end of the second-floor corridor, I discovered a medium-sized, windowless room, where no one was hauling crates of ammunition or piling sandbags. In fact, the room was deserted.

A number of baskets on rollers had been pushed close together; they were full of letters bearing stamps of all colors. It was a low-ceilinged room with ocher-red wallpaper. I detected a slight smell of rubber. An unshaded light blub hung from the ceiling. Oskar was too tired to look for the switch. Far in the distance the bells of St. Mary's, St. Catherine's, St. John's, St. Bridget's, St. Barbara's, Trinity, and Corpus

Christi announced: It is nine o'clock. You must go to sleep now, Oskar. And so I lay down in one of the mail baskets, bedded down my drum that was as tired as I was by my side, and fell asleep.

The Polish Post Office

I SLEPT IN a laundry basket full of letters mailed in Lodz, Lublin, Lemberg, Thorn, Krakau, and Tschenstochau or addressed to people in Lodz, Lublin, Lwow, Toruń, Krakow, and Częstochowa. But I dreamed neither of the Matka Boska Częstochowska nor of the Black Madonna. In my dreams I nibbled neither on Marszałek Pilsudski's heart, preserved in Cracow, nor on the gingerbread that has made the city of Thorn so famous. I did not even dream of my still unrepaired drum. Lying dreamless in a laundry basket on rollers, Oskar heard none of the whispering, twittering, and chattering that allegedly fill the air when many letters lie in a heap. To me those letters didn't breathe a word, I wasn't expecting any mail, and no one could have had the slightest ground for regarding me as an addressee, let alone a sender. Lordly and self-sufficient, I slept with retracted antennae on a mountain of mail gravid with news, a mountain which might have been the world.

Consequently I was not awakened by the letter which a certain Lech Milewczyk in Warsaw had written his niece in Danzig-Schidlitz, a letter alarming enough to have awakened a millenarian turtle; what woke me up was either the nearby machine-gun fire or the distant roar of the salvos from the double turrets of the battleships in the Free Port.

All that is so easily written: machine guns, double turrets. Might it not just as well have been a shower, a hailstorm, the approach of a late summer storm similar to the storm that had accompanied my birth? I was too sleepy and speculation of this sort was not in my repertory. With the sounds still fresh in my ears, I guessed right and like all sleepyheads called a spade a spade: They are shooting, I said to myself.

Oskar climbed out of the laundry basket and stood there wobbling on his pins. His first thought was for the fate of his sensitive drum. With both hands he scooped out a hole in the letters that had sheltered his slumbers, but he was not brutal about it; though loosely piled, the letters were often dovetailed, but he did not tear, bend, or deface, no, cautious-

ly I picked out the scrambled letters, giving individual attention to each single envelope with its "Poczta Polska" postmark—most of them were violet—and even to the postcards. I took care that none of the envelopes should come open, for even in the presence of events so momentous as to change the face of the world, the secrecy of the mails must remain sacred.

As the machine-gun fire increased, the crater in the laundry basket deepened. Finally I let well enough alone, laid my mortally wounded drum to rest in its freshly dug bed, and covered it well, with ten, perhaps twenty layers of envelopes fitted together in overlapping tiers, as masons fit bricks together to build a solid wall.

I had no sooner completed my precautionary measures, with which I hoped to protect my drum from bullets and shell fragments, when the first antitank shell burst against the post office façade, on the Hevelius-Platz side.

The Polish Post Office, a massive brick building, could be counted on to absorb a good many such hits. There seemed to be no danger that the Home Guard would quickly open up a breach wide enough to permit the frontal attack they had often rehearsed.

I left my safe, windowless storeroom enclosed by three offices and the corridor, to go looking for Jan Bronski. In searching for Jan, my presumptive father, there is no doubt that I was also looking, perhaps with still greater eagerness, for Kobyella, the crippled janitor. For, after all, had I not gone without supper the evening before, had I not taken the streetcar to the Hevelius-Platz and braved the soldiery to enter this post office building which under normal conditions left me cold, in order to have my drum repaired? If I should not find Kobyella on time, that is, before the all-out attack that was surely coming, it seemed scarcely possible that my ailing drum would ever get the expert treatment it needed.

And so Oskar thought of Kobyella and looked for Jan. His arms folded across his chest, he paced the long, tiled corridor and found nothing but solitude. Amid the steady not to say lavish gunfire of the Home Guard, he could make out single shots that must have been fired from inside the building, but the economy-minded defenders had no doubt stayed right in their offices, having merely exchanged their rubber stamps for other implements that could also do a stamp job of sorts. There was no one sitting, standing, or lying in the corridor in readiness for a possible counterattack. Oskar

all Dr. Michon, who bore the responsibility, were very excited and scared; I had to forgive them.

The clock in the main hall told me that it was 4:20. When it was 4:21, I inferred that the first hostilities had left the clockwork unharmed. The clock was running, and I was at a loss to know whether this equanimity on the part of time should be taken as a good or bad omen.

In any case, I remained for the present in the main hall, looking for Jan and Kobyella and keeping out of Dr. Michon's way. I found neither my uncle nor the janitor. I noted damage to the glass windows and also cracks and ugly holes in the plaster beside the main entrance, and I had the honor of being present when the first two wounded were carried in. One of them, an elderly gentleman, his gray hair still neatly parted, spoke excitedly and without interruption as his wound—a bullet had grazed his forearm—was being bandaged. No sooner had his arm been swathed in white than he jumped up, seized his rifle, and started back to the rampart of sandbags, which was not, I think, quite bullet-proof. How fortunate that a slight faintness brought on by loss of blood forced him to lie down again and take the rest indispensable to an elderly gentleman who has just been wounded. Moreover, the wiry little quinquagenarian, who wore a steel helmet but from whose breast pocket peered the tip of a silk handkerchief, this gentleman with the elegant movements of a knight in government office, the very same Dr. Michon who had sternly questioned Jan Bronski the previous evening, commanded the wounded elderly gentleman to keep quiet in the name of Poland.

The second wounded man lay breathing heavily on a straw tick and showed no further desire for sandbags. At regular intervals he screamed loudly and without shame; he had been shot in the belly.

Still searching, Oskar was about to give the row of men behind the sandbags another inspection when two shells, striking almost simultaneously above and beside the main entrance, set the hall to rattling. The chests that had been moved against the door burst open, releasing piles of bound records, which fluttered aloft, scattered, and landed on the tile floor where they came into contact with slips and tags whose acquaintance they were never intended to make. Needless to say, the rest of the window glass burst asunder, while great chunks and smaller chunks of plaster fell from the walls and ceiling. Another wounded man was carried into the

quarters Building on Schneidermühlen-Gasse. A little later we were all sent sprawling. The Home Guard had managed to blast the door into the package room above the loading ramp. In another minute they were in the package room, and soon the door to the corridor leading to the main hall was open.

The men who had carried up the wounded man and bedded him in the mail basket where my drum lay rushed off; others followed them. By the noise I judged that they were fighting in the main-floor corridor, then in the package room. The Home Guards were forced to withdraw.

First hesitantly, then with assurance, Oskar entered the storeroom. The wounded man's face was greyish-yellow; he showed his teeth and his eyeballs were working behind closed lids. He spat threads of blood. But since his head hung out over the edge of the mail basket, there was little danger of his soiling the letters. Oskar had to stand on tiptoe to reach into the basket. The man's seat was resting, and resting heavily, exactly where Oskar's drum lay buried. At first Oskar pulled gingerly, taking care not to hurt either the wounded postal clerk or the letters; then he tugged more violently. At length, with a furious ripping and tearing, he managed to remove several dozen envelopes from beneath the groaning man.

Today, it pleases me to relate that my fingers were already touching the rim of my drum when men came storming up the stairs and down the corridor. They were coming back, they had driven the Home Guards from the package room; for the time being they were victorious. I heard them laughing.

Hidden behind one of the mail baskets, I waited near the door until they crowded round the wounded man. At first shouting and gesticulating, then cursing softly, they bandaged him.

Two antitank shells struck the wall of the façade on the level of the ground floor, then two more, then silence. The salvos from the battleships in the Free Port, across from the Westerplatte, rolled along in the distance, an even, gut-natured grumbling—you got used to it.

Unnoticed by the bandagers, I slipped out of the storeroom, leaving my drum in the lurch, to resume my search for Jan, my presumptive father and uncle, and also for Katiula the janitor.

On the third floor was the apartment of Chief Postal ~~Officer~~

retary Naczalnik, who had apparently sent his family off to Bromberg or Warsaw in time. First I searched a few store-rooms on the court side, and then I found Jan and Kobylla in the nursery of the Naczalnik flat.

It was a light, friendly room with amusing wallpaper, which unfortunately had been gashed here and there by stray bullets. In peaceful times, it must have been pretty nice to look out the windows at the Hevelius-Platz. An unharmed rocking horse, balls of various sizes, a medieval castle full of upset tin soldiers mounted and on foot, an open cardboard box full of rails and miniature freight cars, several more or less tattered dolls, doll's houses with disorderly interiors, in short a superabundance of toys showed that Chief Postal Secretary Naczalnik must have been the father of two very spoiled children, a boy and a girl. How lucky that the brats had been evacuated to Warsaw and that I was spared a meeting with such a pair, the like of which was well known to me from the Bronskis. With a slight sadistic pleasure I reflected how sorry the little boy must have been to leave his tin soldiers. Maybe he had put a few Uhlans in his pants pocket to reinforce the Polish cavalry later on at the battle for the fortress of Modlin.

Oskar has been going on too much about tin soldiers; the truth is that there's a confession he has to make and he may as well get on with it. In this nursery there was a kind of bookcase full of toys, picture books, and games; the top shelf was taken up with miniature musical instruments. A honey-yellow trumpet lay silent beside a set of chimes which followed the hostilities with enthusiasm, that is to say, whenever a shell struck, they went bim-bim. A brightly painted accordion hung down on one side. The parents had been insane enough to give their offspring a real little fiddle with four real strings. And next to the fiddle, showing its white, undamaged roundness, propped on some building blocks to keep it from rolling off the shelf, stood—you'll never believe it!—a toy drum encased in red and white lacquer.

I made no attempt to pull the drum down from the rack by my own resources. Oskar was quite conscious of his limited reach and was not beyond asking grownups for favors in cases where his gnomelike stature resulted in helplessness.

Jan Bronski and Kobylla lay behind a rampart of sandbags filling the lower third of the windows that started at the floor. Jan had the left-hand window. Kobylla's place was on the right. I realized at once that the janitor was not likely to

find the time to recover my drum from its hiding place beneath the wounded, blood-spitting post-office defender who was surely crushing it, and repair it. Kobyeella was very busy; at regular intervals he fired his rifle through an embrasure in the sandbag rampart at an antitank gun that had been set up on the other side of the Hevelius-Platz, not far from Schneidermühlen-Gasse and the Radaune Bridge.

Jan lay huddled up, hiding his head and trembling. I recognized him only by his fashionable dark-grey suit, though by now it was pretty well covered with plaster and sand. The lace of his right, likewise grey shoe had come open. I bent down and tied it into a bow. As I drew the bow tight, Jan quivered, raised his disconcertingly blue eyes above his sleeve, and gave me an unconscionably blue, watery stare. Although, as Oskar quickly determined, he was not wounded, he was weeping silently. He was afraid. I ignored his whimpering, pointed to young Naczalnik's drum, and asked Jan with transparent gestures to step over to the bookcase, with the utmost caution, of course, and taking advantage of the dead corner of the nursery, and hand me down the drum. My uncle did not understand me. My presumptive father did not see what I was driving at. My mama's lover was busy with his fear, so full of it that my pleading gestures had no other effect than to add to his fear. Oskar would have liked to scream at him, but was afraid of distracting Kobyeella, who seemed to have ears only for his rifle.

And so I lay down beside Jan on the sandbags and pressed close to him, in the hope of communicating a part of my accustomed equanimity to my unfortunate uncle and presumptive father. In a short while he seemed rather calmer. By breathing with exaggerated regularity, I persuaded his pulse to become approximately regular. But when, far too soon I must admit, I tried once more to call Jan's attention to Naczalnik Junior's drum by turning his head slowly and gently but firmly in the direction of the bookcase, he still failed to see what I wanted. Terror invaded him by way of his feet, surged up through him and filled him ~~anxiety~~; then it flowed back down again, but was unable to escape perhaps because of the inner soles he always wore and rebounded invading his stomach, his spleen, his liver, his head and expanding so mightily that his blue eyes burst out from their sockets and the whites disclosed a network of blood vessels which Oskar had never before had occasion to observe in his uncle's eyes.

It cost me time and effort to drive my uncle's eyeballs back into place, to make his heart behave a little. But all my esthetic efforts were frustrated when the Home Guards began to fire that field howitzer of theirs and, with an accuracy bearing witness to the high quality of their training, flattened out the iron fence in front of the building by demolishing, one by one, the brick posts to which it was anchored. There must have been from fifteen to twenty of those posts and Jan suffered heart and soul at the demise of each one, as though it were no mere pedestals that were being pounded into dust but with them imaginary statues of imaginary gods, well known to my uncle and necessary to his very existence.

It is only by some such thought that I can account for the scream with which Jan registered each hit of the howitzer, a scream so shrill and piercing that, had it been consciously shaped and aimed, it would, like my own glass-killing creations, have had the virtue of a glass-cutting diamond. There was fervor in Jan's screaming but no plan or system; all it accomplished was at long last to attract Kobyella's attention; slowly the bony, crippled janitor crept toward us, raised his cadaverous, eyelashless bird's bead, and surveyed our distress society out of watery grey eyeballs. He shook Jan. Jan whimpered. He opened Jan's shirt and passed his hand quickly over Jan's body, looking for a wound—I could hardly keep from laughing. Failing to detect the slightest scratch, he turned him over on his back, seized him by the jaw, and shook it till the joints cracked, looked him grimly in the eye, swore at him in Polish, spraying his face with saliva in the process, and finally tossed him the rifle which Jan, though provided with his own private embrasure, had thus far left untouched; in fact it was still on safety. The stock struck his kneecap with a dull thud. The brief pain, his first physical pain after so much mental torment, seemed to do him good, for he seized the rifle, took fright when he felt the coldness of the metal parts in his fingers and a moment later in his blood, but then, encouraged by Kobyella, alternately cursing and coaxing, crept to his post.

For all the effeminate lushness of his imagination, my presumptive father took so realistic a view of war that it was hard, in fact impossible, for him to be brave. Instead of surveying his field of vision through his embrasure and picking out a worth-while target, he tilted his rifle so that it pointed upward, over the roofs of the houses on the Hevelius-Platz; quickly and blindly he emptied his magazine

and, again empty-handed, crawled back behind the sandbags. The sheepish look with which he implored the janitor's forgiveness made me think of a schoolboy trying to confess that he has not done his homework. Kobyeella gnashed his teeth in rage; when he had had enough of that, he burst out laughing as though he never would stop. Then with terrifying suddenness, his laughter broke off, and he gave Bronski, who as postal secretary was supposed to be his superior officer, a furious kick in the shins. His ungainly foot was drawn back for a kick in the ribs, but just then a burst of machine-gun fire shattered what was left of the upper windowpanes and scored the ceiling. The orthopedic shoe fell back into place; he threw himself behind his rifle and began to fire with morose haste, as though to make up for the time he had wasted on Jan. At all events, he accounted for a fraction, however infinitesimal, of the ammunition consumed during the Second World War.

Had the janitor failed to notice me? He was ordinarily a gruff kind of man; like many war invalids, he had a way of keeping you at a respectful distance. Why, I wondered, did he tolerate my presence in this drafty room? Could Kobyeella have thought: it's a nursery after all, so why shouldn't Oskar stay here and play during lulls in the battle?

I don't know how long we lay flat, I between Jan and the left-hand wall of the room, both of us behind the sandbags, Kobyeella behind his rifle, shooting for two. It must have been about ten o'clock when the shooting died down. It grew so still that I could hear the buzzing of flies; I heard voices and shouts of command from the Hevelius-Platz, and occasionally turned an ear to the dull drone of the naval guns in the harbor. A fair to cloudy day in September, the sun spread a coating of old gold, the air was thin, sensitive, and yet hard of hearing. My fifteenth birthday was coming up in the next few days. And as every year in September, I wished for a drum, nothing less than a drum; renouncing all the treasures of the world, my mind was set unswervingly on a tin drum, lacquered red and white.

Jan didn't stir. Kobyeella's breathing was so even that Oskar began to think he was asleep, that he was taking advantage of the brief lull in the battle to take a little nap, for do not all men, even heroes, need a refreshing little nap now and then? I alone was wide awake and, with all the unpromising concentration of my years, intent on that drum. It should not be supposed that I *remembered* young Naczarzik;

drum in this moment, as the silence gathered and the buzzing of a fly tucked out from the summer heat died away. Oh, no. Even during the battle, even amid the tumult, Oskar hadn't taken his eyes off that drum. But it was only now that I saw the golden opportunity which every fiber of my being commanded me to seize.

Slowly Oskar arose, moved slowly, steering clear of the broken glass, but unswerving in purpose and direction, toward the bookcase with the toys; he was already figuring how, by putting the box of building blocks on one of the little nursery chairs, he would build a stand high and solid enough to make him the possessor of a brand-new drum, when Kobyella's voice and immediately thereafter his horny hand held me back. Desperately I pointed at the drum. It was so near. Kobyella pulled me back. With both arms I reached out for the drum. The janitor was weakening; he was just about to reach up and hand me happiness when a burst of machine-gun fire invaded the nursery and several anti-tank shells exploded in front of the entrance; Kobyella flung me in the corner beside Jan Bronski and resumed his position behind his rifle. I was still looking up at the drum when he started on his second magazine.

There lay Oskar, and Jan Bronski, my sweet blue-eyed uncle, didn't even lift up his nose when the clubfoot with the bird's head and the watery lashless eyes caught me, hard before my goal, and thrust me into the corner behind the sandbags.

Fat, bluish-white, eyeless maggots wriggled and multiplied, looking for a worthwhile corpse. What was Poland to me? Or the Poles for that matter? Didn't they have their cavalry? Let them ride. They were always kissing ladies' hands and never till it was too late did they notice that what they were kissing was not a lady's languid fingers but the unrouged muzzle of a field howitzer. And the daughter of the Krupps proceeded to vent her feelings. She smacked her lips, gave a corny yet convincing imitation of battle noises, the kind you hear in newsreels. She peppered the front door of the post office, burst into the main hall, and tried to take a bite out of the staircase, so that no one would be able to move up or down. Then came her retinue: machine guns and two trim little armored reconnaissance cars with their names painted on them. And what pretty names: *Ostmark* and *Sudetenland*. What fun they were having! Back and forth they drove, rat-tat-tatting from behind

their armor and looking things over: two young ladies intent on culture and so eager to visit the castle, but the castle was still closed. Spoiled young things they were, just couldn't wait to get in. Bursting with impatience, they cast penetrating, lead-grey glances, all of the same caliber, into every visible room in the castle, making things hot, cold, and uncomfortable for the castellans.

One of the reconnaissance cars—I think it was the *Ostmark*—was just rolling back toward us from Rittergrasse when Jan, my uncle, who for some time now had seemed totally inanimate, moved his right leg toward the embrasure he was supposed to be shooting through and raised it high in the air, hoping no doubt that somebody would see it and take a shot at it, or that a stray bullet would take pity on him and graze his calf or heel, inflicting the blessed injury that permits a soldier to limp—and what a limp!—off the battlefield.

A difficult position to hold for very long. From time to time Jan was obliged to relax. But then he changed his position. By lying on his back and propping up his leg with both hands, he was able to expose his calf and heel for a very considerable period and vastly improve their prospects of being hit by an aimed or errant bullet.

Great as my sympathy for Jan was and still is, I could easily understand the temper it put Kobyella in to see Postal Secretary Bronski, his superior, in this desperate, not to say ludicrous posture. The janitor leapt to his feet and with a second leap was standing over us. He seized Jan's jacket and Jan with it, lifted the bundle and dashed it down, up down, up down; dropping it for good, he hauled off with his left, hauled off with his right; then, still not satisfied, his two hands met in mid-air and clenched into one great fist that was going to crush my presumptive father when—there came a whirring as of angels' wings, a singing as of the ether singing over the radio. It didn't hit Bronski, no, it hit Kobyella, Lord, what a sense of humor that projectile had: bricks laughed themselves into splinters and splinters into dust, plaster turned to flour, wood found its ax, the whole silly nursery hopped on one foot, Käthe Kruse dolls burst open, the rocking horse ran away—how happy it would have been to have a rider to throw off!—Polish Uhlans occupied all four corners of the room at once, and at last, the toy rack toppled over: the chimes rang in Easter, the accordion screamed, the trumpet blew something or other, the whole

of spades, and Oskar had a new drum which beat against his knee at every step while Jan and a man whom Jan called Victor carried the janitor, weak from loss of blood, downstairs to the storeroom for undeliverable mail.

The Card House

THOUGH LOSING MORE and more blood, the janitor was becoming steadily heavier. Victor Weluhn helped us to carry him. Victor was very nearsighted, but at the time he still had his glasses and was able to negotiate the stone steps without stumbling. Victor's occupation, strange as it may seem for one so nearsighted, was delivering funds sent by money order. Nowadays, as often as Victor's name comes up, I refer to him as poor Victor. Just as my mama became my poor mama as a result of a family excursion to the harbor breakwater, Victor, who carried money for the post office, was transformed into poor Victor by the loss of his glasses, though other considerations played a part.

"Have you ever run into poor Victor?" I ask my friend Vittlar on visiting days. But since that streetcar ride from Flingern to Gerresheim—I shall speak of it later on—Victor Weluhn has been lost to us. It can only be hoped that his persecutors have also been unable to locate him, that he has found his glasses or another suitable pair, and if it isn't too much to ask, that he is carrying money again, if not for the Polish Post Office—that cannot be—then for the Post Office of the Federal Republic, and that, nearsighted but bespectacled, he is once more delivering happiness in the form of multicolored banknotes and hard coins.

"Isn't it awful," said Jan, supporting Kobyella on one side and panting under the weight.

"And the Lord knows how it will end," said Victor, who was holding up the other side, "if the English and the French don't come."

"Oh, they'll come all right. Only yesterday Rydz-Smigly said on the radio: 'We have their pledge,' he said. 'If it comes to war, all France will rise as one man.'" Jan had difficulty in maintaining his assurance until the end of the sentence, for though the sight of his own blood on the back of his hand cast no doubt on the Franco-Polish treaty of mutual defense, it did lead him to fear that he might bleed



go along. "Pass." And Kobyella? Despite the braces, he was sagging again. But we pulled him up and waited for the noise of a shell that had struck somewhere far from our gaming room to die down. Then Jan hissed into the erupting silence: "Twenty-four, Kobyella. Didn't you hear the boy's bid?"

Who knows from what cavernous depths the janitor awoke. Ever so slowly he jacked up his eyelids. Finally his watery gaze took in the ten cards which Jan had pressed discreetly, conscientiously refraining from looking at them, into his hand.

"Pass," said Kobyella, or rather we read it from his lips, which were too parched for speech.

I played a club single. On the first tricks Jan, who was playing contra, had to roar at Kobyella and poke him good-naturedly in the ribs, before he would pull himself together and remember to play. I started by drawing off all their trumps. I sacrificed the king of clubs, which Jan took with the jack of spades, but having no diamonds, I recovered the lead by trumping Jan's ace of diamonds and drew his ten of hearts with my jack. Kobyella discarded the nine of diamonds, and then I had a sure thing with my chain of hearts. One-play-two-contra-three-schneider-four-times-clubs-is-forty-eight-or-twelve-pfennigs. It wasn't until the next hand, when I attempted a more than risky grand without two that things began to get exciting. Kobyella, who had had both jacks but only bid up to thirty-three, took my jack of diamonds with the jack of clubs. Then, as though revived by the trick he had taken, he followed up with the ace of diamonds and I had to follow suit. Jan threw in the ten, Kobyella took the trick and played the king, I should have taken but didn't, instead I discarded the eight of clubs, Jan threw in what he could, he even led once with the ten of spades, I bettered it and I'm damned if Kobyella didn't top the pile with the jack of spades, I'd forgotten that fellow or rather thought Jan had it, but no, Kobyella had it. Naturally he led another spade, I had to discard, Jan played something or other, the rest of the tricks were mine but it was too late: grand-without-two-play-three-makes-sixty-hundred-and-twenty-for-the-loser-makes-thirty-pfennigs. Jan loaned me two gulden in change, and I paid up, but despite the hand he had won, Kobyella had collapsed again, he didn't take his winnings and even the first antitank shell bursting on the stairs didn't mean a thing to the poor janitor, though it was his stair-

sumptive father's terror by the one effective means: skat-playing.

And so we played and refused to let Kobyella die. He just couldn't get around to it, for I took good care that the cards should be in movement at all times. When, after an explosion on the stairs, the candles toppled over and the flames vanished, it was I who had the presence of mind to do the obvious, to take a match from Jan's pocket, and Jan's gold-tipped cigarettes too while I was at it; it was I who restored light to the world, lit a comforting Regatta for Jan, and pierced the night with flame upon flame before Kobyella could take advantage of the darkness to make his getaway.

Oskar stuck two candles on his new drum and set down the cigarettes within reach. He wanted none for himself, but from time to time he would pass Jan a cigarette and put one between Kobyella's distorted lips. That helped; the tobacco appeased and consoled, though it could not prevent Jan Bronski from losing game after game. Jan perspired and, as he had always done when giving his whole heart to the game, tickled his upper lip with the tip of his tongue. He grew so excited that in his enthusiasm he began to call me Alfred or Matzerath and to take Kobyella for my poor mama. When out in the corridor someone screamed: "They've got Konrad!" he looked at me reproachfully and said: "For goodness' sake, Alfred, turn off the radio. A man can't hear himself think in here."

Jan became really irritated when the door was torn open and the lifeless Konrad was dragged in.

"Close that door. You're making a draft!" he protested. There was indeed a draft. The candles flickered alarmingly and came to their senses only when, after dumping Konrad in a corner, the men had closed the door behind them. A strange threesome we made. Striking us from below, the candlelight gave us the look of all-powerful wizards. Kobyella bid his hearts without two; twenty-seven, thirty, he said, or rather gurgled. His eyes had a way of rolling out of sight and there was something in his right shoulder that wanted to come out, that quivered and jumped like mad. It finally stopped, but Kobyella sagged face foremost, setting the mail basket which he was tied to rolling with the dead suspenderless man on top of it. With one blow into which he put all his strength Jan brought Kobyella and the mail basket to a standstill, whereupon Kobyella, once more prevented from sneaking out on us, finally piped "Hears!"

Jan hissed "Contra" and Kobyyella "Double contra." At this moment it came to Oskar that the defense of the Polish Post Office had been successful, that the assailants, having scarcely begun the war, had already lost it, even if they succeeded in occupying Alaska and Tibet, the Easter Islands and Jerusalem.

The only bad part of it was that Jan was unable to play out his beautiful, sure-thing grand hand with four and a declaration of *schneider schwarz*.

He led clubs; now he was calling me Agnes while Kobyyella had become his rival Matzerath. With an air of false innocence he played the jack of diamonds—I was much happier to be my poor mama for him than to be Matzerath—then the jack of hearts—it didn't appeal to me one bit to be mistaken for Matzerath. Jan waited impatiently for Matzerath, who in reality was a crippled janitor named Kobyyella, to play; that took time, but then Jan slammed down the ace of hearts and was absolutely unwilling and unable to understand, the truth is he had never fully understood, he had never been anything but a blue-eyed boy, smelling of cologne and incapable of understanding certain things, and so he simply could not understand why Kobyyella suddenly dropped all his cards, tugged at the laundry basket with the letters in it and the dead man on top of the letters, until first the dead man, then a layer of letters, and finally the whole excellently plaited basket toppled over, sending us a wave of letters as though we were the addressees, as though the thing for us to do now was to put aside our playing cards and take to reading our correspondence or collecting stamps. But Jan didn't feel like reading and he didn't feel like collecting, he had collected too much as a child, he wanted to play, he wanted to play out his grand hand to the end, he wanted to win, Jan did, to triumph. He lifted Kobyyella up, set the basket back on its wheels, but let the dead man lie and also neglected to put the letters back in the basket. Anyone could see that the basket was too light, yet Jan showed the utmost astonishment when Kobyyella, dangling from the light, unstable basket, just wouldn't sit still but sagged lower and lower. Finally Jan shouted at him: "Alfred, I beg of you, don't be a spoilsport. Just this one little game and then we'll go home. Alfred, will you listen to me!"

Oskar arose wearily, fought down the increasing pains in his limbs and head, laid his wiry little drummer's hands on Jan Bronski's shoulders, and forced himself to speak, gently

but with authority: "Leave him be, Papa. He can't play any more. He's dead. We can play sixty-six if you like."

Jan, whom I had just addressed as my father, released the janitor's mortal envelope, gave me an overflowing blue stare, and wept nononono . . . I patted him, but still he said no. I kissed him meaningly, but still he could think of nothing but his interrupted grand.

"I would have won it, Agnes. It was a sure thing." So he lamented to me in my poor mama's stead, and I—his son—threw myself into the role, yes, he was right, I said, I swore that he would have won, that to all intents and purposes he actually had won, that he simply must believe what his Agnes was, telling him. But Jan wouldn't believe; he believed neither me nor my mama. For a time his weeping was loud and articulate; then his plaint subsided into an unmodulated blubbering, and he began to dig skat cards from beneath the cooling Mount Kobyella; some he scraped from between his legs, and the avalanche of mail yielded a few. Jan would not rest before he had recovered all thirty-two. One by one, he cleaned them up, wiping away the sticky blood. When he had done, he shuffled and prepared to deal. Only then did his well-shaped forehead—it would have been unjust to call it low, though it was rather too smooth, rather too impenetrable—admit the thought that there was no third skat hand left in this world.

It grew very still in the storeroom for undeliverable mail. Outside, as well, a protracted minute of silence was dedicated to the memory of the world's last skat hand. To Oskar it seemed, though, that the door was slowly opening. Looking over his shoulder, expecting heaven knows what supernatural apparition, he saw Victor Weluhn's strangely blind empty face. "I've lost my glasses, Jan. Are you still there? We'd better run for it. The French aren't coming or, if they are, they'll be too late. Come with me, Jan. Lead me, I've lost my glasses."

Maybe Victor thought he had got into the wrong room. For when he received no answer and no guiding arm was held out to him, he withdrew his unspectacled face and closed the door. I could still hear Victor's first few steps as, groping his way through the fog, he embarked on his flight.

Heaven knows what comical incident may have transpired in Jan's little head to make him start laughing, first softly and plaintively but then loudly and boisterously, making his fresh, pink little tongue quiver like a bell clapper. He tossed

to an optician's in the Altstädtischer Graben, had himself fitted out with a pair of glasses, his own having been lost in the battle of the post office. Freshly bespectacled, Victor Weluhn—for it was he—allegedly went so far as to have a beer on the Holzmarkt, and then another, for the flame throwers had made him thirsty. Then with his new glasses, which dispersed the environing mists up to a certain point, but not nearly as well as his old ones had done, had started on the flight that continues—such is the doggedness of his pursuers!—to this day.

The others, however—as I have said, there were some thirty of them who couldn't make up their minds to run for it—were standing against the wall across from the side entrance when Jan leaned the queen of hearts against the king of hearts and, thoroughly blissful, took his hands away.

What more shall I say? They found us. They flung the door open, shouting "Come out!" stirred up a wind, and the card house collapsed. They had no feeling for this kind of architecture. Their medium was concrete. They built for eternity. They paid no attention whatever to Postal Secretary Bronski's look of indignation, of bitter injury. They didn't see that before coming out Jan reached into the pile of cards and picked up something, or that I, Oskar, wiped the candle ends from my newly acquired drum, took the drum but spurned the candle ends, for light was no problem with all those flashlights shining in our eyes. They didn't even notice that their flashlights blinded us and made it hard for us to find the door. From behind flashlights and rifles, they shouted: "Come out of there," and they were still shouting "Come out" after Jan and I had reached the corridor. These "come outs" were directed at Kobyella, at Konrad from Warsaw, at Bobek and little Wischnewski, who in his lifetime had kept the telegraph window. The invaders were alarmed at these men's unwillingness to obey. I gave a loud laugh every time the Home Guards shouted "Come out" and after a while they saw they were making fools of themselves, stopped shouting, and said, "Oh!" Then they led us to the thirty in the courtyard with arms upraised and hands folded behind their necks, who were thirsty and having their pictures taken for the newsreels.

The camera had been mounted on top of an automobile. As we were led out through the side door, the photographers swung it around at us and shot the short strip that was later shown in all the movie houses.

I was separated from the thirty defenders by the wall. At this point Oskar remembered his gnomelike stature, he remembered that a three-year-old is not responsible for his comings and goings. Again he felt those disagreeable pains in his head and limbs; he sank to the ground with his drum, began to thrash and flail, and ended up throwing a fit that was half real and half put on, but even during the fit he hung on to his drum. They picked him up and handed him into an official car belonging to the SS Home Guard. As the car drove off, taking him to the City Hospital. Oskar could see Jan, poor Jan, smiling stupidly and blissfully into the air. In his upraised hands he held a few skat cards and with one hand—holding the queen of hearts, I think—he waved to Oskar, his departing son.

He Lies in Suspense

I HAVE JUST reread the last paragraph. I am not too well satisfied, but Oskar's pen ought to be, for writing tersely and succinctly, it has managed, as terse, succinct accounts so often do, to exaggerate and mislead, if not to lie.

Wishing to stick to the truth, I shall try to circumvent Oskar's pen and make a few corrections: in the first place, Jan's last hand, which he was unhappily prevented from playing out and winning, was not a grand hand, but a diamond hand without two; in the second place, Oskar, as he left the storeroom, picked up not only his new drum but also the old broken one, which had fallen out of the laundry basket with the dead suspenderless man and the letters. Furthermore, there is a little omission that needs filling in: No sooner had Jan and I left the storeroom for undeliverable mail at the behest of the Home Guards with their "Come outs," their flashlights, and their rifles, than Oskar, concerned for his comfort and safety, made up to two Home Guards who struck him as good-natured, uncle-like souls, put on an imitation of pathetic sniveling, and pointed to Jan, his father, with accusing gestures which transformed the poor man into a villain who had dragged off an innocent child to the Polish Post Office to use him, with typically Polish inhumanity, as a buffer for enemy bullets.

Oskar counted on certain benefits for both his drums, and his expectations were not disappointed: the Home Guards kicked Jan in the small of the back and battered him with their rifle stocks, but left me both drums, and one middle-aged Home Guard with the careworn creases of a paterfamilias alongside of his nose and mouth stroked my cheeks, while another, tow-headed fellow, who kept laughing and in laughing screwed up his eyes so you couldn't see them, picked me up in his arms, which was distasteful and embarrassing to Oskar.

Even today, it fills me with shame to think, as I sometimes do, of this disgusting behavior of mine, but I always comfort myself with the thought that Jan didn't notice,

behind their necks, they—and Jan—after having their pictures taken for the newsreels, were taken first to the evacuated Victoria School, then to Schiesstange Prison. Finally, early in October, they were entrusted to the porous sand behind the wall of the run-down, abandoned old cemetery in Saspe.

How did Oskar come to know all this? I heard it from Leo Schugger. For of course there was never any official announcement to tell us against what wall the thirty-one men were shot and what sand was shoveled over them.

Hedwig Bronski first received a notice to vacate the flat in Ringstrasse, which was taken over by the family of a high-ranking officer in the Luftwaffe. While she was packing with Stephan's help and preparing to move to Ramkau—where she owned a house and a few acres of forest and farmland—she received the communication which made her officially a widow. She gazed at it out of eyes which mirrored but did not penetrate the sorrows of the world, and it was only very slowly, with the help of her son Stephan, that she managed to distil the sense of it.

Here is the communication:

COURT-MARTIAL, EBERHARDT ST. L. GROUP 41/39

ZOPPOT, 6 OCT. 1939

MRS. HEDWIG BRONSKI,

You are hereby informed that Bronski, Jan, has been sentenced to death for irregular military activity and executed.

ZELEWSKI

(Inspector of Courts-Martial)

So you see, not a word about Saspe. Out of solicitude for the men's relatives, who would have been crushed by the expense of caring for so large and flower-consuming a mass grave, the authorities assumed full responsibility for maintenance and perhaps even for transplantation. They had the sandy soil leveled and the cartridge cases removed, except for one—one is always overlooked—because cartridge cases are out of place in any respectable cemetery, even an abandoned one.

But this one cartridge case, which is always left behind, the one that concerns us here, was found by Leo Schugger, from whom no burial, however discreet, could be kept se-

last hours, spent between terror and card houses. They wanted a confession from me that would put Jan in the clear; as though I had it in my power to clear him, as though my testimony carried any weight.

Supposing I had sent an affidavit to the court-martial of the Eberhardt Group. What would I have said? I, Oskar Matzerath, avow and declare that on the evening of August 31 I waited outside Jan Bronski's home for him to come home and lured him, on the ground that my drum needed repairing, back to the Polish Post Office, which Jan Bronski had left because he did not wish to defend it.

Oskar made no such confession; he did nothing to exculpate his presumptive father. Every time he decided to speak, to tell the old people what had happened, he was seized with such convulsions that at the demand of the head nurse his visiting hours were curtailed and the visits of his grandmother Anna and his presumptive grandfather Vincent were forbidden.

The two old people, who had walked in from Bissau and brought me apples, left the children's ward with the wary, helpless gait of country folk in town. And with each receding step of my grandmother's four skirts and her brother's black Sunday suit, redolent of cow dung, my burden of guilt, my enormous burden of guilt increased.

So much happened at once. While Matzerath, the Greffs, the Schefflers crowded round my bed with fruit and cakes, while my grandmother and Uncle Vincent walked in from Bissau by way of Goldkrug and Brenntau because the railroad line from Karthaus to Langfuhr had not yet been cleared, while nurses, clad in anesthetic white, babbled hospital talk and substituted for angels in the children's ward, Poland was not yet lost, almost lost, and finally, at the end of those famous eighteen days, Poland was lost, although it was soon to turn out that Poland was not yet lost; just as today, despite the efforts of the Silésian and East Prussian patriotic societies, Poland is not yet lost.

O insane cavalry! Picking blueberries on horseback. Bearing lances with red and white pennants. Squadrons of melancholy, squadrons of tradition. Picture-book charges. Racing across the fields before Lodz and Kutno. At Modlin substituting for the fortress. Oh, so brilliantly galloping! Always waiting for the sunset. Both foreground and background must be right before the cavalry can attack, for battles were made to be picturesque and death to be painted, poised in mid-

it came to me that I hadn't thought of my drums for weeks, that there was something else in the world for me beside drums, to wit, nurses.

Matzerath held me by the hand as, still rather shaky on my three-year-old pins, I left the City Hospital with my instruments and my new self-knowledge, for the flat in Labesweg, there to face the tedious weekdays and still more tedious Sundays of the first war year.

One Tuesday late in November, I was allowed to go out for the first time after weeks of convalescence. As he was gloomily drumming through the streets, paying little attention to the cold rain, whom should Oskar run into on the corner of Max-Halbe-Platz and Brüsener-Weg but Leo Schugger, the former seminarist.

We stood for some time exchanging embarrassed smiles, and it was not until Leo plucked a pair of kid gloves from the pockets of his morning coat and pulled the yellowish-white, skinlike coverings over his fingers and palms, that I realized whom I had met and what this encounter would bring me. Oskar was afraid.

For a while we examined the windows of Kaiser's grocery store, looked after a few streetcars of lines Number 5 and 9, which crossed on Max-Halbe-Platz, skirted the uniform houses on Brüsener-Weg, revolved several times round an advertising pillar, studied a poster telling when and how to exchange Danzig gulden for reichsmarks, scratched a poster advertising Persil soap powder, and found a bit of red under the blue and white but let well enough alone. We were just starting back for Max-Halbe-Platz when suddenly Leo Schugger pushed Oskar with both hands into a doorway, reached under his coat-tails with the gloved fingers of his left hand, poked about in his pants pocket, sifted the contents, found something, studied it for a moment with his fingers, then, satisfied with what he had found, removed his closed fist from his pocket, and let his coat-tail fall back into place. Slowly he thrust forward the gloved fist, forward and still forward, pushing Oskar against the wall of the doorway; longer and longer grew his arm, but the wall did not recede. That arm, I was beginning to think, was going to jump out of its socket, pierce my chest, pass through it, and make off between my shoulder blades and the wall of this musty doorway. I was beginning to fear that Oskar would never see what Leo had in his fist, that the most he would ever learn in this doorway was the text of the house

tion of Pelonken and divides the airfield from the new drill ground, Leo Schugger stopped and stood for a time, his head cocked on one side, his saliva flowing over the cartridge case, observing my trembling little body. He sucked in the cartridge case, held it with his lower lip, then, following a sudden inspiration, flailed wildly with his arms, removed his long-tailed morning coat, and threw the heavy cloth, smelling of moist earth, over my head and shoulders.

We started off again. I don't know whether Oskar was any less cold. Sometimes Leo leapt five steps ahead and then stopped; as he stood there in his rumpled but terrifying white shirt, he seemed to have stepped directly out of a medieval dungeon, perhaps the Stockturm, to illustrate a disquisition on *What the Lunatics Will Wear*. Whenever Leo turned his eyes on Oskar staggering along in the long coat, he burst out laughing and flapped his wings like a raven. I must indeed have looked like a grotesque bird, a raven or crow, especially with those coat-tails dragging over the asphalt highway like a train or a huge mop and leaving a broad majestic track, which filled Oskar with pride whenever he looked back, and foreshadowed, if it did not symbolize, the tragic fate, not yet fully implemented, that slumbered within him.

Even before leaving Max-Halbe-Platz, I had suspected that Leo had no intention of taking me to Brösen or Neufahrwasser. From the very start it was perfectly clear that our destination could only be the cemetery in Saspe, near which a modern rifle range had been laid out for the Security Police.

From September to April the cars serving the seaside resorts ran only every thirty-five minutes. As we were leaving the suburb of Langfuhr, a car without trailer approached from the direction of Brösen and passed us by. A moment later the car that had been waiting on the Magdeburger-Strasse siding came up behind us and passed by. It was not until we had almost reached the cemetery, near which there was a second siding, that another car moved up clanking and tinkling behind us, and soon its companion piece, which we had long seen waiting in the mist up ahead, its yellow light shining wet in the fog, started up and passed us by.

The flat morose face of the motorman was still sharp in Oskar's mind when Leo Schugger led him off the asphalt road, through loose sand not very different from that of the

dunes by the beach. The cemetery was square with a wall running round it. We went in on the south side, through a little gate that was covered with ornamental rust and only supposed to be locked. Most of the tombstones were of black Swedish granite or diorite, rough hewn on the back and sides and polished in front. Some leaned perilously, others had already toppled. Unfortunately Leo left me no time to look at them more closely. The place was poor in trees; five or six gnarled and moth-eaten scrub pines, that was all. Mama in her lifetime had admired this tumble-down graveyard; as she often said, it was her favorite among last resting places. And now she lay in Brenntau. There the soil was richer, elms and maples grew.

By way of an open gate that had lost its grating, Leo led me out of the cemetery through the northern wall, before I could attune my thoughts to its romantic decay. Close behind the wall the soil was flat and sandy. Amid the steaming fog, broom, scrub pine, and dog rose stretched out toward the coast. When I looked back toward the cemetery, it struck me at once that a piece of the northern wall had been freshly whitewashed.

Close to this stretch of wall, which gave the impression of being new, as painfully white as Leo's rumpled shirt, Leo became very active. He took great long strides which he appeared to count; at all events, he counted aloud and, as Oskar believes to this day, in Latin. Whatever this litany was, he chanted it as he had no doubt learned to do at the seminary. Leo marked a spot some ten yards from the wall and also set down a piece of wood not far from the whitewashed portion, where, it seemed pretty obvious, the wall had been mended. All this he did with his left hand, for in his right hand he held the cartridge case. Finally, after interminable searching and measuring, he bent down near the piece of wood and there deposited the hollow metallic cylinder, slightly tapered at the front end, which had lodged a lead kernel until someone with a curved forefinger had exerted just enough pressure to evict the lead projectile and start it on its death-dealing change of habitat.

We stood and stood. The spittle flowed from Leo Schugger's mouth and hung down in threads. Wringing his gloves, he chanted for a time in Latin, but stopped after a while as there was no one present who knew the responses. From time to time he turned about and cast a peevish, impatient look over the wall toward the highway, especially when

the streetcars, empty for the most part, stopped at the switch and clanged their bells as they passed one another by and moved off in opposite directions. Leo must have been waiting for mourners. But neither on foot nor by car did anyone arrive to whom he could extend a glove in condolence.

Once some planes roared over us, preparing to land. We did not look up, we submitted to the noise without bothering to ascertain that three planes of the Ju-52 type, with blinking lights on their wing tips, were preparing to land.

Shortly after the motors had left us—the stillness was as painful as the wall facing us was white—Leo Schugger reached into his shirt and pulled something out. A moment later he was standing beside me. Tearing his crow costume from Oskar's shoulders, he darted off coastward, into the broom, dog rose, and scrub pine, and in departing dropped something with a calculated gesture suggesting that it was meant to be found.

Only when Leo had vanished for good—for a time he could be seen moving about in the foreground like a spook, until at last he was swallowed up by low-lying pools of milky mist—only when I was all alone with the rain, did I reach out for the object that lay in the sand: it was a skat card, the seven of spades.

A few days after this meeting at Saspe Cemetery, Oskar met his grandmother Anna Kojaciek at the weekly market in Langfuhr. Now that there was no more borderline at Bissau, she was able once again to bring her eggs, butter, cabbages, and winter apples to market. The people bought plentifully, they had begun to lay in stocks, for food rationing was in the offing. Just as Oskar caught sight of his grandmother sitting behind her wares, he felt the skat card on his bare skin, beneath his coat, sweater, and undershirt. At first, while riding back from Saspe to Max-Halbe-Platz, after a streetcar conductor had invited me to come along free of charge, I had meant to tear up that seven of spades. But Oskar did not tear it up. He gave it to his grandmother. She seemed to take fright behind her cabbages when she saw him. Maybe it passed through her mind that Oskar's presence could bode no good. But then she motioned the three-year-old urchin, half-hiding behind some baskets of fish, to come over. Oskar took his time; first he examined a live codfish nearly a yard long, lying in a bed of moist seaweed, then watched some crabs crawling about in a basket; finally, himself adopting the gait of a crab, he approached

his grandmother's stand with the back of his sailor coat and, turning to show her his gold anchor buttons; jostled one of the sawhorses under her display and started the apples rolling.

Schwerdtfeger came over with his hot bricks wrapped in newspaper, shoved them under my grandmother's skirts, removed the cold bricks with his rake as he had done ever since I could remember, made a mark on the slate that hung from his neck, and proceeded to the next stand while my grandmother handed me a shining apple.

What could Oskar give her if she gave him an apple? He gave her first the skat card and then the cartridge case, for he hadn't abandoned that in Saspe either. For quite some time Anna Koljaiczek stared uncomprehending at these two so disparate objects. Then Oskar's mouth approached her aged cartilaginous ear beneath her kerchief and, throwing caution to the winds, I whispered, thinking of Jan's pink, small, but fleshy ear with the long, well-shaped lobes. "He's lying in Saspe," Oskar whispered and ran off, upsetting a basket of cabbages.

Maria

WHILE HISTORY, BLARING special communiqué from the top of its lungs, sped like a well-greased amphibious vehicle over the roads and waterways of Europe and through the air as well, conquering everything in its path, my own affairs, which were restricted to the belaboring of lacquered toy drums, were in a bad way. While the history-makers were throwing expensive metal out the window with both hands, I, once more, was running out of drums. Yes, yes, Oskar had managed to save a new instrument with scarcely a scratch on it from the Polish Post Office, so lending some significance to the defense of said post office, but what could Naczelnik Junior's drum mean to me, Oskar, who in my least troubled days had taken barely eight weeks to transform a drum into scrap metal?

Distressed over the loss of my nurses, I began to drum furiously soon after my discharge from the City Hospital. That rainy afternoon in Saspe Cemetery did nothing to diminish my drumming; on the contrary, Oskar redoubled his efforts to destroy the last witness to his shameful conduct with the Home Guards, namely, that drum.

But the drum withstood my assaults; as often as I struck it, it struck back accusingly. The strange part of it is that during this pounding, whose sole purpose was to eradicate a very definite segment of my past, Victor Weluhn, the carrier of funds, kept turning up in my mind, although, nearsighted as he was, his testimony against me couldn't have amounted to much. But hadn't he managed to escape despite his nearsightedness? Could it be that the nearsighted see more than others, that Weluhn, whom I usually speak of as poor Victor, had read my gestures like the movements of a black silhouette, that he had seen through my betrayal and that now, on his flight, he would carry Oskar's secret, Oskar's shame, all over the world with him?

It was not until the middle of December that the accusations of the serrated red and white conscience round my neck began to carry less conviction: the lacquer cracked and

peeled; the tin grew thin and fragile. Condemned to look on at this death agony, I was eager, as one always is in such cases, to shorten the sufferings of the moribund, to hasten the end. During the last weeks of Advent, Oskar worked so hard that Matzerath and the neighbors held their heads, for he was determined to settle his accounts by Christmas Eve; I felt confident that for Christmas I should receive a new and guiltless drum.

I made it. On the twenty-fourth of December I was able to rid my body and soul of a rusty, dissipated, shapeless something suggestive of a wrecked motor car; by discarding it, I hoped, I should be putting the defense of the Polish Post Office behind me forever.

Never has any human being—if you are willing to accept me as one—known a more disappointing Christmas than Oskar, who found everything imaginable under the Christmas tree, save only a drum.

There was a set of blocks that I never opened. A rocking swan, viewed by the grownups as the most sensational of presents, was supposed to turn me into Lohengrin. Just to annoy me, no doubt, they had had the nerve to put three or four picture books on the gift table. The only presents that struck me as in some sense serviceable were a pair of gloves, a pair of boots, and a red sweater knitted by Gretchen Scheffler. In consternation Oskar looked from the building blocks to the swan, and stared at a picture in one of the picture books, showing an assortment of Teddy bears which were not only too cute for words but, to make matters worse, held all manner of musical instruments in their paws. One of these cute hypocritical beasts even had a drum; he looked as if he knew how to drum, as if he were just about to strike up a drum solo; while as for me, I had a swan but no drum, probably more than a thousand building blocks but not one single drum; I had mittens for bitter-cold winter nights, but between my gloved fists no round, smooth-lacquered, metallic, and ice-cold object that I might carry out into the winter nights, to warm their icy heart.

Oskar thought to himself: Matzerath has hidden the drum. Or Gretchen Scheffler, who has come with her baker to polish off our Christmas goose, is sitting on it. They are determined to enjoy my enjoyment of the swan, the building blocks, the picture books, before disgorging the real treasure. I gave in; I leafed like mad through the picture books, swung myself upon the swan's back and, fighting back my mount-

ing repugnance, rocked for at least half an hour. Despite the overheated apartment I let them try on the sweater; aided by Gretchen Scheffler, I slipped into the shoes. Meanwhile the Greffs had arrived, the goose had been planned for six, and after the goose, stuffed with dried fruit and masterfully prepared by Matzerath, had been consumed, during the dessert, consisting of stewed plums and pears, desperately holding a picture book which Greff had added to my four other picture books; after soup, goose, red cabbage, boiled potatoes, plums, and pears, under the hot breath of a tile stove which had hot breath to spare, we all sang, Oskar too, a Christmas carol and an extra verse, Rejoice, and Ochristmastree, ochristmastree, greenarethybellstingalingtingelingyear-afteryear, and I was good and sick of the whole business; outside the bells had already started in, and I wanted my drum; the alcoholic brass band, to which Meyn the musician had formerly belonged, blew so the icicles outside the window . . . but I wanted my drum, and they wouldn't give it to me, they wouldn't cough it up. Oskar: "Yes!" The others: "No!" Whereupon I screamed, it was a long time since I had screamed, after a long rest period I filed my voice once again into a sharp, glass-cutting instrument; I killed no vases, no beer glasses nor light bulbs, I opened up no showcase nor deprived any spectacles of their power of vision—no, my vocal rancor was directed against all the balls, bells, light refracting silvery soap bubbles that graced the Ochristmastree: with a tinkle tinkle and a klingaling, the tree decorations were shattered into dust. Quite superfluously several dustpans full of fir needles detached themselves at the same time. But the candles went on burning, silent and holy, and with it all Oskar got no drum.

Matzerath had no perception. I don't know whether he was trying to wean me away from my instrument or whether it simply didn't occur to him to keep me supplied, amply and punctually, with drums. I was threatened with disaster. And it was only the coincidence that just then the mounting disorder in our shop could no longer be overlooked which brought help, before it was too late, both to me and the shop.

Since Oskar was neither big enough nor in any way inclined to stand behind a counter selling crackers, margarine, and synthetic honey, Matzerath, whom for the sake of complicity I shall once more call my father, took on Maria

Truczinski, my poor friend Herbert's youngest sister, to work in the store.

She wasn't just called Maria; she *was* one. It was not only that she managed, in only a few weeks, to restore the reputation of our shop; quite apart from her firm though friendly business management, to which Matzerath willingly submitted, she showed a definite understanding for my situation.

Even before Maria took her place behind the counter, she had several times offered me an old washbasin as a substitute for the lump of scrap metal with which I had taken to stamping accusingly up and down the more than hundred steps of our stairway. But Oskar wanted no substitute. Steadfastly he refused to drum on the bottom of a washbasin. But no sooner had Maria gained a firm foothold in the shop than she succeeded, Matzerath to the contrary notwithstanding, in fulfilling my desires. It must be admitted that Oskar could not be moved to enter a toystore with her. The inside of one of those emporiums bursting with multicolored wares would surely have inspired painful comparisons with Sigismund Markus' devastated shop. The soul of kindness, Maria would let me wait outside while she attended to the purchases alone; every four or five weeks, according to my needs, she would bring me a new drum. And during the last years of the war, when even toy drums had grown rare and come to be rationed, she resorted to barter, offering the storekeepers sugar or a sixteenth of a pound of real coffee and receiving my drum under the counter in return. All this she did without sighing, shaking her head, or glancing heavenward, but seriously and attentively and as matter-of-factly as though dressing me in freshly washed, properly mended pants, stockings, and school smocks. Though, in the years that followed, the relations between Maria and me were in constant flux and have not been fully stabilized to this day, the way in which she hands me a drum has remained unchanged, though the prices are a good deal higher than in 1940.

Today Maria subscribes to a fashion magazine. She is becoming more chic from one visiting day to the next. But what of those days?

Was Maria beautiful? She had a round, freshly washed face and the look in her somewhat too prominent grey eyes with their short but abundant lashes and their dark, dense brows that joined over the nose, was cool but not cold. High

cheekbones—when it was very cold, the skin over them grew taut and bluish and cracked painfully—gave the planes of which her face was constructed a reassuring balance which was scarcely disturbed by her diminutive but not unbeautiful or comical nose, which though small was very well shaped. Her forehead was small and round, marked very early by thoughtful vertical creases toward the middle. Rising from the temples, her brown, slightly curly hair, which still has the sheen of wet tree trunks, arched tightly over her little round head, which, like Mother Truczinski's, showed little sign of an occiput. When Maria put on her white smock and took her place behind the counter in our store, she still wore braids behind her florid, healthy ears, the lobes of which unfortunately did not hang free but grew directly into the flesh of her lower jaws—there were no ugly creases, but still the effect was degenerate enough to admit of inferences about Maria's character. Later on, Matzerath talked her into a permanent and her ears were hidden. Today, beneath tousled, fashionably short-cropped hair, Maria exhibits only the lobes of her ears; but she hides the flaw in her beauty beneath large clips that are not in very good taste.

Similar in its way to her small head with its full cheeks, prominent cheekbones, and large eyes on either side of her small, almost insignificant nose, Maria's body, which was distinctly on the small side, disclosed shoulders that were rather broad, full breasts swelling upward from her armpits, and an ample pelvis and rear end, which in turn were supported by legs so slender, though quite robust, that you could see between them beneath her pubic hair.

It is possible that Maria was a trifle knock-kneed in those days. Moreover, it seemed to me that in contrast to her figure, which was that of a grown woman, her little red hands were childlike and her fingers reminded me rather of sausages. To this day there is something childlike about those paws of hers. Her feet, however, shod at the time in lumpy hiking shoes and a little later in my poor mama's chic, but outmoded high heels, which were scarcely becoming to her, gradually lost their childish redness and drollness in spite of the ill-fitting hand-me-downs they were forced into and gradually adapted themselves to modern shoe fashions of West German and even Italian origin.

Maria did not talk much but liked to sing as she was washing the dishes or filling blue pound and half-pound bags with sugar. When the shop closed and Matzerath

busied himself with his accounts, or on Sundays, when she sat down to rest, Maria would play the harmonica that her brother Fritz had given her when he was drafted and sent to Gross-Boschpol.

Maria played just about everything on her harmonica. Scout songs she had learned at meetings of the League of German Girls, operetta tunes, and song hits that she had heard on the radio or learned from her brother Fritz, who came to Danzig for a few days at Easter 1940 on official business. But Maria never took out her "Hohner" during business hours. Even when there were no customers about, she refrained from music and wrote price tags and inventories in a round childlike hand.

Though it was plain for all to see that it was she who ran the store and had won back a part of the clientele that had deserted to our competitors after my poor mama's death, her attitude toward Matzerath was always respectful to the point of servility; but that didn't embarrass Matzerath, who had never lacked faith in his own worth.

"After all," he argued when Greff the greengrocer and Gretchen Scheffler tried to nettle him, "it was me that hired the girl and taught her the business." So simple were the thought processes of this man who, it must be admitted, became more subtle, more sensitive, and in a word more interesting only when engaged in his favorite occupation, cookery. For Oskar must give the devil his due: his Kassler Rippchen with sauerkraut, his pork kidneys in mustard sauce, his Wiener Schnitzel, and, above all, his carp with cream and horse radish, were splendid to look upon and delectable to smell and taste. There was little he could teach Maria in the shop, because the girl had a native business sense whereas Matzerath himself knew little about selling over the counter though he had a certain gift for dealing with the wholesalers, but he did teach Maria to boil, roast, and stew; for though she had spent two years working for a family of civil servants in Schidlitz, she could barely bring water to a boil when she first came to us.

Soon Matzerath's program was very much what it had been in my poor mama's lifetime: he reigned in the kitchen, outdoing himself from Sunday roast to Sunday roast, and spent hours of his time contentedly washing the dishes. In addition, as a sideline so to speak, he attended to the buying and ordering, the accounts with the wholesale houses and the Board of Trade—occupations which became more and more

complicated as the war went on—carried on, and not without shrewdness, the necessary correspondence with the fiscal authorities, decorated the showcase with considerable imagination and good taste, and conscientiously performed his so-called Party duties. All in all—while Maria stood imperturbably behind the counter—he was kept very busy.

You may ask: what am I getting at with these preparatory remarks, why have I gone into so much detail about a young girl's cheekbones, eyebrows, ear lobes, hands, and feet? I agree with you perfectly, I too am opposed to this kind of description. Oskar knows perfectly well that he has succeeded at best in distorting Maria's image in your mind, perhaps for good. For this reason I will add one sentence that should make everything clear: If we disregard all the anonymous nurses, Maria was Oskar's first love.

I became aware of this state of affairs one day when, as seldom happened, I listened to my drumming. I could not help noticing the insistent new note of passion which Oskar, despite all his precautions, was communicating to his drum. Maria took this drumming in good part. But I was none too pleased when she set her harmonica to her lips, assumed an unprepossessing frown, and felt called upon to accompany me. Often, though, while darning stockings or filling sugar bags, her quiet eyes would gaze earnestly and attentively at me and my drumsticks and, before resuming her work, she would run her hand slowly and sleepily over my short-cropped hair.

Oskar, who ordinarily could not bear the slightest contact, however affectionately meant, accepted Maria's hand and became so enslaved to this caress that he would often, quite consciously, spend hours drumming the rhythms that brought it on, until at last Maria's hand obeyed and brought him well-being.

After a while Maria began to put me to bed at night. She undressed me, washed me, helped me into my pajamas, advised me to empty my bladder one last time before going to sleep, prayed with me, although she was a Protestant, an Our Father, three Hail Mary's and from time to time a Jesusfortheelivejesusfortheeldie, and finally tucked me in with a friendly, drowsy-making face.

Pleasant as were the last minutes before putting out the light—gradually I exchanged Our Father and Jesusfortheelive for the tenderly allusive Starofthesealgreethee and MaryIlovethee—these daily preparations for bed embarrassed

busied himself with his accounts, or on Sundays, when she sat down to rest, Maria would play the harmonica that her brother Fritz had given her when he was drafted and sent to Gross-Boschpol.

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me. They almost shattered my self-control, reducing Oskar—who had always prided himself on his mastery over his features—to the telltale blushes of starry-eyed maidens and tormented young men. Oskar must own that every time Maria undressed me, put me in the zinc tub, scrubbed the dust of a drummer's day off me with washcloth, brush, and soap, every time it was brought home to me that I, almost sixteen, was standing or sitting mother-naked in the presence of a girl somewhat older than myself, I blushed long and loud.

But Maria did not seem to notice my change of color. Could she have thought that washcloth and brush brought such a flush to my cheeks? Or was Maria modest and tactful enough to see through my daily evenglow and yet to overlook it?

I am still subject to this sudden flush, impossible to hide, that may last as much as five minutes or longer. Like my grandfather, Koljaiczek the firebug, who turned flaming red whenever the word "match" was dropped in his hearing, the blood rushes to my head whenever anyone, even a total stranger, speaks in my presence of small children being tubbed and scrubbed before they go to bed at night. Oskar stands there like an Indian; those around me call me eccentric if not vicious; for what can it mean to them that little children should be soaped, scrubbed, and visited with a washcloth in their most secret places?

Maria, on the other hand, was a child of nature: she did the most daring things in my presence without embarrassment. Before scrubbing the living room or bedroom floor, she would hoist her skirt to mid-thigh and take off her stockings, a gift from Matzerath, for fear of soiling them. One Saturday after the shop had closed—Matzerath had business at the local Party headquarters—Maria shed her skirt and blouse, stood beside me in a pitiful but clean petticoat, and began to remove some spots from her skirt and artificial silk blouse with gasoline.

What could it have been that gave Maria, whenever she removed her outer garments and as soon as the smell of gasoline had worn off, a pleasantly and naïvely bewitching smell of vanilla? Did she rub herself with some such extract? Was there a cheap perfume with this sort of smell? Or was this scent as specific to her as, for example, ammonia to Mrs. Kater or rancid butter to my grandmother's skirts? Oskar, who liked to get to the bottom of things, investigated the vanilla: Maria did not anoint herself. Maria just

smelled that way. Yes, I am still convinced that she was not even aware of the scent that clung to her; for on Sunday, when, after roast veal with mashed potatoes and cauliflower in brown butter, a vanilla pudding trembled on the table because I was tapping my foot on the table leg, Maria, who was wild about other varieties of pudding, ate but little and with evident distaste, while Oskar to this day is in love with this simplest and perhaps most commonplace of all puddings.

In July, 1940, shortly after the special communiqués announcing the rapid success of the French campaign, the Baltic bathing season opened. While Maria's brother Fritz, now a corporal, was sending the first picture postcards from Paris, Matzerath and Maria decided that Oskar must go to the beach, that the sea air would surely be good for his health. It was decided that Maria should take me at midday—the shop was closed from one to three—to the beach at Brösen, and if she stayed out until four, Matzerath said, it didn't matter; he liked to stand behind the counter from time to time and show himself to the customers.

A blue bathing suit with an anchor sewn on it was purchased for Oskar. Maria already had a green one with red trimmings that her sister Guste had given her as a confirmation present. Into a beach bag from Mama's days were stuffed a white woolen bathrobe of the same vintage and, quite superfluously, a pail and shovel and a set of sand molds. Maria carried the bag, while I carried my drum.

Oskar was apprehensive of the streetcar ride past the cemetery at Saspe. Was it not to be feared that the sight of this silent, yet so eloquent spot would put a crimp in his enthusiasm about bathing, which was no more than moderate to begin with? What, Oskar asked himself, will the ghost of Jan Bronski do when his assassin, dressed for summer, goes jingling past his grave in a streetcar?

The Number 9 car stopped. The conductor announced Saspe. I looked fixedly past Maria in the direction of Brösen, whence the other car crept toward us, growing gradually larger. Mustn't let my eyes wander. What, after all, was there to look at? Scrub pines, rusty ironwork, a maze of tumble-down tombstones with inscriptions that only the thistles and wild oats could read. Under such circumstances, it was better to look out the open window and up into the sky: there they hummed, the fat Ju-52's, as only trimotored planes or enormous flies can hum in a cloudless July sky.

We moved up with a great clanging of bells and the other car cut off our view. The moment we passed the trailer, my head turned of its own accord and I was treated to the whole tumble-down cemetery and also a bit of the north wall; the white patch lay in the shadow, but it was still painfully white. . . .

Then the cemetery was gone, we approached Brösen, and once again I looked at Maria. She had on a light summer dress with a flower pattern. On her round neck with its faintly radiant skin, over her well-upholstered collarbone, she wore a necklace of red wooden cherries, all the same size and simulating bursting ripeness. Was it my imagination or did I really smell it? Maria seemed to be taking her vanilla scent along with her to the Baltic. Oskar leaned slightly forward, took a long whiff of it, and in an instant vanquished the moldering Jan Bronski. The defense of the Polish Post Office had receded into history even before the flesh had fallen from the defenders' bones. Oskar, the survivor, had very different smells in his nostrils than that of his presumptive father, once so elegant a figure, now dust.

In Brösen Maria bought a pound of cherries, took me by the hand—well she knew that only she was permitted to do so—and led me through the pine woods to the bathing establishment. Though I was nearly sixteen—the attendant had no eye for such things—I was allowed into the ladies' section. Water: 65, said the blackboard, air: 80; wind: east; forecast: fair. Beside the blackboard hung a poster, dealing with artificial respiration. The victims all had on striped bathing suits, the rescuers wore mustaches, straw hats floated upon treacherous, turbulent waters.

The barefooted girl attendant went ahead. Around her waist, like a penitent, she wore a cord from which hung the enormous key that opened the cabins. Plank walks. Railings. Alongside the cabins a hard runner of coconut fiber. We had cabin Number 53. The wood of the cabin was warm, dry, and of a natural bluish-white hue that I should call blind. Beside the window hung a mirror that had ceased to take itself seriously.

First Oskar had to undress. This I did with my face to the wall and it was only reluctantly that I let Maria help me. Then Maria turned me round in her sturdy, matter-of-fact way, held out my new bathing suit, and forced me ruthlessly into the tight-fitting wool. No sooner had I buttoned the shoulder straps than she lifted me up on the wooden bench

against the back wall of the cabin, put my drum and sticks on my lap, and began, with quick energetic movements, to undress.

First I drummed a little and counted the knotholes in the floorboards. Then I stopped counting and drumming. It was quite beyond me why Maria, with oddly pursed lips, should whistle while removing her shoes, two high notes, two low notes, and while stripping off her socks. Whistling like the driver of a brewery truck, she took off the flowery dress, whistling she hung up her petticoat over her dress, dropped her brassiere, and still without finding a tune, whistled frantically while pulling her panties, which were really gym shorts, down to her knees, letting them slip to the floor, climbing out of the rolled-up pants legs, and kicking the shorts into the corner with one foot.

Maria frightened Oskar with her hairy triangle. Of course he knew from his poor mama that women are not bald down there, but for him Maria was not a woman in the sense in which his mama had shown herself to be a woman in her dealings with Matzerath or Jan Bronski.

And I recognized her at once. Rage, shame, indignation, disappointment, and a nascent half-comical, half-painful stiffening of my watering can under my bathing suit made me forget drum and drumsticks for the sake of the new stick I had developed.

Oskar jumped up and flung himself on Maria. She caught him with her hair. He buried his face in it. It grew between his lips. Maria laughed and tried to pull him away. I drew more and more of her into me, looking for the source of the vanilla smell. Maria was still laughing. She even left me to her vanilla, it seemed to amuse her, for she didn't stop laughing. Only when my feet slipped and I hurt her—for I didn't let go the hair or perhaps it was the hair that didn't let me go—only when the vanilla brought tears to my eyes, only when I began to taste mushrooms or some acrid spice, in any case, something that was not vanilla, only when this earthy smell that Maria concealed behind the vanilla brought me back to the smell of the earth where Jan Bronski lay moldering and contaminated me for all time with the taste of perishability—only then did I let go.

Oskar slipped on the blind-colored boards of the bathhouse cabin and was still crying when Maria, who was laughing once more, picked him up, caressed him, and pressed

him to the necklace of wooden cherries which was all she had on.

Shaking her head, she picked her hairs from between my lips and said in a tone of surprise: "What a little rascal you are! You start up and you don't know what's what and then you cry."

Fizz Powder

DOES THAT MEAN anything to you? Formerly, you could buy it at any time of year in little flat packages. In our shop my mamma sold woodruff fizz powder in a nauseatingly green little bag. Another sack that had the color of not-quite-ripe oranges claimed to have an orange flavor. There was also a raspberry flavor, and another variety which, if you poured fresh water over it, hissed, bubbled, and acted excited, and if you drank it before it quieted down, tasted very remotely like lemon, and had a lemon color in the glass, only more so: an artificial yellow masquerading as poison.

What else was on the package except for the flavor? Natural Product, it said. Patented. Protect Against Moisture, and, under a dotted line, Tear Here.

Where else could you buy this fizz powder? Not only in my mama's shop was it for sale, but in all grocery stores, except for Kaiser's and the cooperatives. In the stores and at all refreshment stands a package cost three pfennigs.

Maria and I got ours free of charge. Only when we couldn't wait to get home were we obliged to stop at a grocery store or refreshment stand and pay three pfennigs or even six, because we could never get enough of it and often asked for two packages.

Who started up with the fizz powder? The old, old quarrel between lovers. I say Maria started it. Maria never claimed that Oskar started it. She left the question open and the most she would say, if pressed, was: "The fizz powder started it."

Of course everyone will agree with Maria. Only Oskar could not accept this verdict. Never would I have admitted that Oskar was seduced by a little package of fizz powder at three pfennigs. I was sixteen, I wanted to blame myself or Maria if need be, but certainly not a powder demanding to be protected against moisture.

It began a few days after my birthday. According to the calendar, the bathing season was drawing to an end. But the

weather would hear nothing of September. After a rainy August, the summer showed its mettle; its belated accomplishment could be read on the bulletin board beside the artificial-respiration poster: air: 84; water: 68; wind: southwest; forecast: generally fair.

While Fritz Truczinski, a corporal in the air corps, sent postcards from Paris, Copenhagen, Oslo, and Brussels—the fellow was always traveling on official business—Maria and I acquired quite a tan. In July we had occupied a place on the family beach. But here Maria had been exposed to the inept horseplay of some boys from the Conradinum and to interminable declarations of love emanating from a student at the Petri School; in mid-August we moved to the beach reserved for ladies, where we found a quiet spot near the water. Buxom ladies panted and puffed as they submerged their varicose veins up to their knees, and naked, misbehaved urchins waged war on fate; that is, they piled up sand into crude castles that kept toppling down.

The ladies' beach: when women are by themselves and think themselves unobserved, a young man—and Oskar was well aware of being a young man beneath the surface—will do well to close his eyes rather than become a witness, however involuntary, to uninhibited womanhood.

We lay in the sand, Maria in her green bathing suit bordered with red, I in my blue one. The sand slept, the sea slept, the shells had been crushed and did not listen. Amber, which allegedly keeps you awake, was elsewhere; the wind, which according to the bulletin board came from the southwest, fell gradually asleep; the whole wide sky, which had surely been overexerting itself, did nothing but yawn; Maria and I were also somewhat tired. We had already bathed and we had eaten after, not before, bathing: Our cherries, reduced to moist pits, lay in the sand beside bleached cherry pits from the previous year.

At the sight of so much transience, Oskar took to picking up handfuls of sand mingled with fresh young cherry pits and others that were one or a thousand years old, and sifting it over his drum; so he impersonated an hourglass and at the same time tried to think himself into the role of death by playing with bones. Under Maria's warm, sleepy flesh I imagined parts of her surely wide-awake skeleton; I relished the view between radius and ulna, played counting games up and down her spine, reached in through her iliac fossae and played with her sternum.

Despite all the fun I was having playing the part of death with my hourglass and my skeleton, Maria moved. Blindly, trusting wholly to her fingers, she reached into the beach bag and looked for something, while I dropped what was left of my sand and cherry pits on the drum, which was almost half-buried. When she failed to find what she was looking for, probably her harmonica, Maria turned the bag inside out: a moment later, something lay on the beach towel; but it was not a harmonica; it was a package of wood-ruff fizz powder.

Maria affected surprise. Or maybe she really was surprised. As for me, my surprise was real: over and over I asked myself, as I still ask myself: how did this package of fizz powder, this miserable cheap stuff, bought only by the children of dock workers and the unemployed, because they had no money for real pop, how did this unsalable article get into our beach bag?

While Oskar pondered, Maria grew thirsty. And breaking off my meditations, I too, quite against my will, had to confess to an irresistible thirst. We had no cup, and besides it was at least thirty-five paces to the drinking water if Maria went and nearly fifty if I did. To borrow a cup from the attendant and use the tap by the bathhouse, it was necessary to pass over burning sand between mountains of flesh shining with Nivea oil, some lying on their backs, others on their bellies.

We both dreaded the errand and left the package lying on the towel. Finally I picked it up, before Maria showed any sign of picking it up. But Oskar only put it back on the towel in order that Maria might reach out for it. Maria did not reach out. So I reached out and gave it to Maria. Maria gave it back to Oskar. I thanked her and made her a present of it. But she wanted no presents from Oskar. I had to put it back on the towel. There it lay a long while without stirring.

Oskar wishes to make it clear that it was Maria who after an oppressive pause picked up the package again. But that was not all: she tore off a strip of paper exactly on the dotted line where it said to Tear Here. Then she held out the opened package—to me. This time Oskar declined with thanks. Maria managed to be vexed. She resolutely laid the open package down on the towel. What was there for me to do but to pick the package up before sand should get into it, and offer it to Maria.

Oskar wishes to make it clear that it was Maria who made

one finger disappear into the opening of the package, who coaxed the finger out again, and held it up vertically for inspection: something bluish-white, fizz powder, was discernible on the fingertip. She offered me the finger. I took it of course. Although it made my nose prickle, my face succeeded in registering pleasure. It was Maria who held out a hollow hand. Oskar could hardly have helped pouring some fizz powder into the pink bowl. What she would do with the little pile of powder, she did not know. This mound in the cup of her hand was something too new, too strange. At this point I leaned forward, summoning up all my spit, and directed it at the powder; I repeated the operation and leaned back only when I was out of saliva.

In Maria's hand a hissing and bubbling set in. The woodruff erupted like a volcano, seethed like the greenish fury of some exotic nation. Something was going on that Maria had never seen and probably never felt, for her hand quivered, trembled, and tried to fly away, for woodruff was biting her, woodruff penetrated her skin, woodruff excited her, gave her a feeling, a feeling, a feeling . . .

The green grew greener, but Maria grew red, raised her hand to her mouth, and licked her palm with a long tongue. This she did several times, so frantically that Oskar was very close to supposing that her tongue, far from appeasing the woodruff feeling that so stirred her, raised it to the limit, perhaps beyond the limit, that is appointed to all feeling.

Then the feeling died down. Maria giggled, looked around to make sure there had been no witnesses, and when she saw that the sea cows breathing in bathing suits were motionless, indifferent, and Nivea-brown, she lay down on the towel; against the white background, her blushes died slowly away.

Perhaps the seaside air of that noonday hour might still have sent Oskar off to sleep, if Maria, after only a few minutes, had not sat up again and reached out once more for the package, which was still half-full. I do not know whether she struggled with herself before pouring the rest of the powder into her palm, which was no longer a stranger to the effect of woodruff. For about as long as a man takes to clean his glasses, she held the package on the left and the bowl on the right, motionless and antagonistic. Not that she directed her gaze toward the package or the hollow hand, or looked back and forth between half-full and empty; no, Maria looked between package and hand with a stern scowl. But her sternness was soon to prove weaker than the half-full package. The

package approached the hollow hand, the hand came to meet the package, the gaze lost its sternness sprinkled with melancholy, became curious, and then frankly avid. With painstakingly feigned indifference, she piled up the rest of the woodruff fizz powder in her well-upholstered palm, which was dry in spite of the heat, dropped package and indifference, propped up the filled hand on the now empty one, rested her grey eyes on the powder for a time, then looked at me, gave me a grey look, her grey eyes were demanding something of me. It was my saliva she wanted, why didn't she take some of her own, Oskar had hardly any left, she certainly had much more, saliva doesn't replenish itself so quickly, she should kindly take her own, it was just as good, if not better, in any case she surely had more than I, because I couldn't make it so quickly and also because she was bigger than Oskar.

Maria wanted my saliva. From the start it was perfectly plain that only my spit could be considered. She did not avert those demanding eyes from me, and I blamed this cruel obstinacy of hers on those ear lobes which, instead of hanging free, grew straight into her lower jaws. Oskar swallowed; he thought of things which ordinarily made his mouth water, but—it was the fault of the sea air, the salt air, the salty sea air no doubt—my salivary glands were on strike. Goaded by Maria's eyes, I had to get up and start on my way. My labor was to take more than fifty steps through the burning sand, looking neither to left nor right, to climb the still more burning steps to the bathhouse, to turn on the tap, to twist my head and hold my mouth under it, to drink, to rinse, to swallow in order that Oskar might be replenished.

When I had completed the journey, so endless and bordered by such terrible sights, from the bathhouse to our white towel, I found Maria lying on her belly, her head nestling in her arms. Her braids lay lazy on her round back.

I poked her, for Oskar now had saliva. Maria didn't budge. I poked her again. Nothing doing. Cautiously I opened her left hand. She did not resist: the hand was empty, as though it had never seen any woodruff. I straightened the fingers of her right hand: pink was her palm, with moist lines, hot and empty.

Had Maria resorted to her own saliva? Had she been unable to wait? Or had she blown away the fizz powder, stifling that feeling before feeling it; had she rubbed her hand clean on the towel until Maria's familiar little paw reappeared,

with its slightly superstitious mound of the moon, its fat Mercury, and its solidly padded girdle of Venus?

Shortly after that we went home, and Oskar will never know whether Maria made the fizz powder fizz for the second time that same day or whether it was not until a few days later that the mixture of fizz powder with my spittle became, through repetition, a vice for herself and for me.

Chance, or if you will a chance pliant to our wishes, brought it about that on the evening of the bathing day just described—we were eating blueberry soup followed by potato pancakes—Matzerath informed Maria and me, ever so circumspectly, that he had joined a little skat club made up of members of the local Party group, that he would meet his new skat partners, who were all unit leaders, two evenings a week at Springer's restaurant, that Sellke, the new local group leader, would attend from time to time, and that that in itself obliged him to be present, which unfortunately meant leaving us alone. The best arrangement, he thought, would be for Oskar to sleep at Mother Truczinski's on skat nights.

Mother Truczinski was agreed, all the more so as this solution appealed to her far more than the proposal which Matzerath, without consulting Maria, had made her the day before, to wit, that instead of my spending the night at Mother Truczinski's, Maria should sleep on our sofa two nights a week.

Up until then Maria had slept in the broad bed where my friend Herbert had formerly laid his scarred back. This extraordinarily heavy piece of furniture stood in the small rear room. Mother Truczinski had her bed in the living room. Guste Truczinski, who still waited on table at the snack bar in the Hotel Eden, lived at the hotel; she occasionally came home on her day off, but rarely spent the night, and when she did, it was on the couch. When Fritz Truczinski, laden with presents, came home on furlough from distant lands, he slept in Herbert's bed, Maria took Mother Truczinski's bed, while the old woman camped on the couch.

This order of things was disturbed by my demands. Originally I was expected to sleep on the couch. This plan I rejected out of hand. Then Mother Truczinski offered to cede me her bed and take the couch for herself. Here Maria objected, her mother needed her sleep, her mother must not be made uncomfortable. Very simply and directly Maria expressed her willingness to share Herbert's former bed with

me. "I'll be all right in the same bed with Oskar," she said. "He's only an eighth of a portion."

And so, twice weekly, beginning a few days later, Maria carried my bedclothes from our ground-floor apartment to the Truczinski dwelling on the second floor and prepared a night lodging for me and my drum on the left side of her bed. On Matzerath's first skat night nothing at all happened. Herbert's bed seemed frightfully big to me. I lay down first, Maria came in later. She had washed herself in the kitchen and entered the bedroom in an old-fashioned, absurdly long and absurdly starched nightgown. Oskar had expected her to be naked and hairy and was disappointed at first, but soon he was perfectly happy, because the heirloom nightgown made pleasant bridges, reminding him of trained nurses and their white draperies.

Standing at the washstand, Maria undid her braids and whistled. Maria always whistled while dressing or undressing, doing or undoing her braids. Even while combing her hair, she never wearied of squeezing out those two notes between her pursed lips, without ever arriving at a tune.

The moment Maria put her comb aside, the whistling stopped. She turned, shook her hair once again, put the washstand in order with a few quick strokes. Order made her frolicsome: she threw a kiss at her photographed, retouched, and mustachioed father in the ebony frame, then with exaggerated gusto jumped into bed and bounced a few times. At the last bounce she pulled up the eiderdown and vanished beneath the mountain as far as her chin. I was lying under my own quilt and she didn't touch me at all; she stretched out a well-rounded arm from under the eiderdown, groped about overhead for the light cord, found it, and switched out the light. Only when it was dark did she say, in much too loud a voice: "Good night!"

Maria was soon breathing evenly. I do not think she was pretending; it is quite likely that she did drop right off to sleep, for the quantities of work she did each day certainly called for corresponding quantities of sleep.

For quite some time, absorbing and sleep-dispelling images passed before Oskar's eyes. For all the dense darkness between the far walls and the blacked-out windows, blonde nurses bent over to examine Herbert's scarred back, from Leo Schugger's white rumpled shirt arose—what else would you expect?—a sea gull, which flew until it dashed itself to pieces against a cemetery wall, which instantly took on a

freshly whitewashed look. And so on. Only when the steadily mounting, drowsy-making smell of vanilla made the film flicker before his eyes did Oskar begin to breathe as peacefully as Maria had been doing for heaven knows how long.

Three days later I was treated to the same demure tableau of maidenly going-to-bed. She entered in her nightgown, whistled while undoing her braids, whistled while combing her hair, put the comb down, stopped whistling, put the washstand in order, threw the photo a kiss, made her wild leap, took hold of the eiderdown, and caught sight—I was contemplating her back—caught sight of a little package—I was admiring her lovely long hair—discovered something green on the quilt—I closed my eyes, resolved to wait until she had grown used to the sight of the fizz powder. The bedsprings screamed beneath the weight of a Maria flopping down backward, I heard the sound of a switch, and when I opened my eyes because of the sound, Oskar was able to confirm what he already knew; Maria had put out the light and was breathing irregularly in the darkness; she had been unable to accustom herself to the sight of the fizz powder. However, it seemed not unlikely that the darkness by her ordained had only given the fizz powder an intensified existence, bringing woodruff to bloom and mingling soda bubbles with the night.

I am almost inclined to think that the darkness was on Oskar's side. For after a few minutes—if one can speak of minutes in a pitch-dark room—I became aware of stirrings at the head end of the bed; Maria was fishing for the light cord, the cord bit, and an instant later I was once more admiring the lovely long hair falling over Maria's sitting nightgown. How steady and yellow shone the light bulb behind the pleated lampshade cover! The eiderdown still bulged untouched on the foot end of the bed. The package on top of the mountain hadn't dared to budge in the darkness. Maria's ancestral nightgown rustled, a sleeve rose up with the little hand belonging to it, and Oskar gathered saliva in his mouth.

In the course of the weeks that followed, the two of us emptied over a dozen little packages of fizz powder, mostly with woodruff flavoring, then, when the woodruff ran out, lemon or raspberry, according to the very same ritual, making it fizz with my saliva, and so provoking a sensation which Maria came to value more and more. I developed a certain skill in the gathering of saliva, devised tricks that

sent the water running quickly and abundantly to my mouth, and was soon able, with the contents of one package, to give Maria the desired sensation three times in quick succession.

Maria was pleased with Oskar; sometimes, after her orgy of fizz powder, she pressed him close and kissed him two or three times, somewhere in the face. Then she would giggle for a moment in the darkness and quickly fall asleep.

It became harder and harder for me to get to sleep. I was sixteen years old; I had an active mind and a sleep-discouraging need to associate my love for Maria with other, still more amazing possibilities than those which lay dormant in the fizz powder and, awakened by my saliva, invariably provoked the same sensation.

Oskar's meditations were not limited to the time after lights out. All day long I pondered behind my drum, leafed through my tattered excerpts from Rasputin, remembered earlier educational orgies between Gretchen Scheffler and my poor mama, consulted Goethe, whose *Elective Affinities* I possessed in excerpts similar to those from Rasputin; from the faith healer I took his elemental drive, tempered it with the great poet's world-encompassing feeling for nature; sometimes I gave Maria the look of the Tsarina or the features of the Grand Duchess Anastasia, selected ladies from among Rasputin's following of eccentric nobles; but soon, repelled by this excess of animal passion, I found Maria in the celestial transparency of an Ottilie or the chaste, controlled passion of a Charlotte. Oskar saw himself by turns as Rasputin in person, as his murderer, often as a captain, more rarely as Charlotte's vacillating husband, and once—I have to own—as a genius with the well-known features of Goethe, hovering over a sleeping Maria.

Strange to say, I expected more inspiration from literature than from real, naked life. Jan Bronski, whom I had often enough seen kneading my mother's flesh, was able to teach me next to nothing. Although I knew that this tangle, consisting by turns of Mama and Jan or Matzerath and Mama, this knot which sighed, exerted itself, moaned with fatigue, and at last fell stickily apart, meant love, Oskar was still unwilling to believe that love was love; love itself made him cast about for some other love, and yet time and time again he came back to tangled love, which he hated until the day when in love he practiced it; then he was obliged to defend it in his own eyes as the only possible love.

Maria took the fizz powder lying on her back. As soon as it bubbled up, her legs began to quiver and thrash and her nightgown, sometimes after the very first sensation, slipped up as far as her thighs. At the second fizz, the nightgown usually managed to climb past her belly and to bunch below her breasts. One night after I had been filling her left hand for weeks, I quite spontaneously—for there was no chance to consult Goethe or Rasputin first—spilled the rest of a package of raspberry powder into the hollow of her navel, and spat on it before she could protest. Once the crater began to seethe, Maria lost track of all the arguments needed to bolster up a protest: for the seething, foaming navel had many advantages over the palm of the hand. It was the same fizz powder, my spit remained my spit, and indeed the sensation was no different, but more intense, much more intense. The sensation rose to such a pitch that Maria could hardly bear it. She leaned forward, as though to quench with her tongue the bubbling raspberries in her navel as she had quenched the woodruff in the hollow of her hand, but her tongue was not long enough; her bellybutton was farther away than Africa or Tierra del Fuego. I, however, was close to Maria's bellybutton; looking for raspberries, I sank my tongue into it and found more and more of them; I wandered far afield, came to places where there was no forester to demand a permit to pick berries; I felt under obligation to cull every last berry, there was nothing but raspberries in my eyes, my mind, my heart, my ears, all I could smell in the world was raspberries, and so intent was I upon raspberries that Oskar said to himself only in passing: Maria is pleased with your assiduity. That's why she has turned off the light. That's why she surrenders so trustingly to sleep and allows you to go on picking; for Maria was rich in raspberries.

And when I found no more, I found, as though by chance, mushrooms in other spots. And because they lay hidden deep down beneath the moss, my tongue gave up and I grew an eleventh finger, for my ten fingers proved inadequate for the purpose. And so Oskar acquired a third drumstick—he was old enough for that. And instead of drumming on tin, I drummed on moss. I no longer knew if it was I who drummed or if it was Maria or if it was my moss or her moss. Do the moss and the eleventh finger belong to someone else and only the mushrooms to me? Did the little gentleman down there have a mind and a will of his own? Who was doing all this: Oskar, he, or I?

And Maria, who was sleeping upstairs and wide awake downstairs, who smelled upstairs of innocent vanilla and under the moss of pungent mushrooms, who wanted fizz powder, but not this little gentleman whom I didn't want either, who had declared his independence, who did just what he was minded to, who did things I hadn't taught him, who stood up when I lay down, who had other dreams than I, who could neither read nor write and nevertheless signed for me, who goes his own way to this very day, who broke with me on the very day I first took notice of him, who is my enemy with whom I am constrained, time and time again, to ally myself, who betrays me and leaves me in the lurch, whom I should like to auction off, whom I am ashamed of, who is sick of me, whom I wash, who befouls me, who sees nothing and flairs everything, who is so much a stranger to me that I should like to call him Sir, who has a very different memory from Oskar: for today when Maria comes into my room and Bruno discreetly slips off into the corridor, he no longer recognizes Maria, he can't, he won't, he sprawls most phlegmatically while Oskar's leaping heart makes my mouth stammer: "Listen to me, Maria, tender suggestions. I might buy a compass and trace a circle around us; with the same compass, I might measure the angle of inclination of your neck while you are reading, sewing, or as now, tinkering with the buttons of my portable radio. Let the radio be, tender suggestions: I might have my eyes vaccinated and find tears again. At the nearest butcher shop Oskar would put his heart through the meat grinder if you would do the same with your soul. We might buy a stuffed animal to have something quiet between us. If I had the worms and you the patience, we might go fishing and be happier. Or the fizz powder of those days? Do you remember? You call me woodruff, I fizz up, you want still more, I give you the rest—Maria, fizz powder, tender suggestions.

"Why do you keep playing with those radio knobs, all you care about nowadays is the radio, as though you were taken with a mad passion for special communiqués."

Special Communiqués

IT IS HARD to experiment on the white disk of my drum. I ought to have known that. My drum always wants the same wood. It wants to be questioned with drumsticks and to beat out striking answers or, with an easy, conversational roll, leave questions and answers open. So you see, my drum is neither a frying pan which, artificially heated, cooks raw meat to a crisp, nor a dance floor for couples who do not know whether they belong together. Consequently, even in the loneliest hours, Oskar has never strewn fizz powder on his drum, mixed his saliva with it, and put on a show that he has not seen for years and that I miss exceedingly. It is true that Oskar couldn't help trying an experiment with said powder, but he proceeded more directly and left the drum out of it; and in so doing, I exposed myself, for without my drum I am always exposed and helpless.

It was hard to procure the fizz powder. I sent Bruno to every grocery store in Grafenberg, I sent him to Gerresheim by streetcar. I asked him to try in town, but even at refreshment stands of the sort you find at the end of streetcar lines, Bruno could find no fizz powder. Young salesgirls had never heard of it, older shopkeepers remembered loquaciously; thoughtfully—as Bruno reported—they rubbed their foreheads and said: "What is it you want? Fizz powder? That was a long time ago. Under Wilhelm they sold it, and under Adolf just in the beginning. Those were the good old days. But if you'd like a bottle of soda or a Coke?"

My keeper drank several bottles of soda pop or Coke at my expense without obtaining what I wanted, and nevertheless Oskar got his fizz powder in the end; yesterday Bruno brought me a little white package without a label; the laboratory technician of our mental hospital, a certain Miss Klein, had sympathetically agreed to open her drawers, phials, and reference works, to take a few grams of this and a few grams of that, and finally, after several attempts, had mixed up a fizz powder which, as Bruno reported, could fizz, prickle, turn green, and taste very discreetly of woodruff.

And today was visiting day. Maria came. But first came Klepp. We laughed together for three-quarters of an hour about something worth forgetting. I was considerate of Klepp and spared his Leninist feelings, avoided bringing up current events, and said nothing of the special announcement of Stalin's death, which had come to me over my little portable radio—given to me by Maria a few weeks ago. But Klepp seemed to know, for a crepe was sewn incompetently to the sleeve of his brown checked overcoat. Then Klepp arose and Vittlar came in. The two friends seem to have quarreled again, for Vittlar greeted Klepp with a laugh and made horns at him. "Stalin's death surprised me as I was shaving this morning," he said sententiously and helped Klepp into his coat. His broad face coated with unctuous piety, Klepp lifted up the black cloth on his sleeve: "That's why I am in mourning," he sighed and, giving an imitation of Armstrong's trumpet, intoned the first funereal measures of "New Orleans Function": trrah trahdaha traah dada dadada—then he slipped through the door.

But Vittlar stayed; he didn't want to sit down, but hopped about in front of the mirror and for a few minutes we exchanged understanding smiles that had no reference to Stalin.

I don't know whether I meant to confide in Vittlar or to drive him away. I motioned him to come close, to incline an ear, and whispered in his great-lohed spoon: "Fizz powder! Does that mean anything to you, Gottfried?" A horrified leap bore Vittlar away from my cage-bed; he thrust out his forefinger and in tones of theatrical passion that came easy to him, declaimed: "Wilt thou seduce me with fizz powder, O Satan? Dost thou not know I am angel?"

And like an angel, Vittlar, not without a last look at the mirror over the washbasin, fluttered away. The young folks outside the mental hospital are really an odd and affected lot.

And then Maria arrived. She has a new tailor-made spring suit and a stylish mouse-grey hat with a discreet, sophisticated straw-colored trimming. Even in my room she does not remove this *objet d'art*. She gave me a cursory greeting, held out her cheek to be kissed, and at once turned on the portable radio which was, to be sure, a present from her to me, but seems to have been intended for her own use, for it is the function of that execrable plastic box to replace a part of our conversation on visiting days. "Did you hear the news this morning? Isn't it exciting? Or didn't you?" "Yes, Maria,"

I replied patiently. "They haven't kept Stalin's death secret from me, but please turn off the radio."

Maria obeyed without a word, sat down, still in her hat, and we spoke as usual about little Kurt.

"Just imagine, Oskar, the little rascal don't want to wear long stockings no more, when it's only March and more cold weather coming, they said so on the radio." I ignored the weather report but sided with Kurt about the long stockings. "The boy is twelve, Maria, he's ashamed to go to school in wool stockings, his friends make fun of him."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, his health comes first; he wears the stockings until Easter."

This date was stated so unequivocally that I tried another tack. "Then you should buy him ski pants, because those long woolen stockings are really ugly. Just think back to when you were his age. In our court in Labesweg. Shorty always had to wear stockings until Easter, you remember what they did to him? Nuchi Eyke, who was killed in Crete, Axel Mischke, who got his in Holland just before the war was over, and Harry Schlager, what did they do to Shorty? They smeared those long woolen stockings of his with tar so they stuck to his skin, and Shorty had to be taken to the hospital."

"That wasn't the fault of the stockings, Susi Kater was to blame," cried Maria furiously. Although Susi had joined the Blitz Girls at the very beginning of the war and was rumored to have married in Bavaria later on, Maria bore Susi, who was several years her senior, a lasting grudge such as women and only women can carry with them from childhood to a ripe old age. Even so, my allusion to Shorty's tar-daubed stockings produced a certain effect. Maria promised to buy Kurt ski pants. We were able to go on to something else. There was good news about Kurt. The school principal had spoken well of him at the parents' and teachers' meeting. "Just imagine. He's second in his class. And he helps me in the shop, I can't tell you what a help he is to me."

I nodded approval and listened as she described the latest purchases for the delicatessen store. I encouraged Maria to open a branch in Oberkassel. The times were favorable, I said, the wave of prosperity would continue—I had just picked that up on the radio. And then I decided it was time to ring for Bruno. He came in and handed me the little white package containing the fizz powder.

Oskar had worked out his plan. Without explanation I

asked Maria for her left hand. She started to give me her right hand, but then corrected herself. Shaking her head and laughing, she offered me the back of her left hand, probably expecting me to kiss it. She showed no surprise until I turned the hand around and poured the powder from the package into a pile between mound of the moon and mound of Venus. But even then she did not protest. She took fright only when Oskar bent down over her hand and spat copiously on the mound of fizz powder.

"Hey, what is this?" she cried with indignation, moved her hand as far from her as possible, and stared in horror at the frothing green foam. Maria blushed from her forehead down. I was beginning to hope, when three quick steps carried her to the washbasin. She let water, disgusting water, first cold, then hot, flow over the fizz powder. Then she washed her hands with my soap.

"Oskar, you're really impossible. What do you expect Mr. Münsterberg to think of us?" She turned to Bruno, who during my experiment had taken up a position at the foot end of the bed, as though pleading with him to overlook my insane behavior. To spare Maria any further embarrassment, I sent the keeper out of the room, and as soon as he had closed the door behind him, called her back to my bedside: "Don't you remember? Please remember. Fizz powder! Three pfennigs a package! Think back! Woodruff, raspberry, how beautifully it foamed and bubbled, and the sensation, Maria, the way it made you feel."

Maria did not remember. She was taken with an insane fear of me, she hid her left hand, tried frantically to find another topic of conversation, told me once again about Kurt's good work in school, about Stalin's death, the new icebox at Matzerath's delicatessen, the projected new branch in Oberkassel. I however, remained faithful to the fizz powder, fizz powder, I said, she stood up, fizz powder, I begged, she said a hasty good-by, plucked at her hat, undecided whether to go or stay, and turned on the radio, which began to squeak. But I shouted above it: "Fizz powder, Maria, remember!"

Then she stood in the doorway, wept, shook her head, and left me alone with the squeaking, whistling radio, closing the door as cautiously as though she were leaving me on my death-bed.

And so Maria can't remember the fizz powder. Yet for me, as long as I may breathe and drum, that fizz powder will

kicked it up in the air, but her panties still hung from it. Then he bit into the velvet cushion again and she screamed: go away, and he wanted to go away, but he couldn't, because Oskar was on top of them before he could go away, because I had plunked down my drum on the small of his back and was pounding it with the sticks, because I couldn't stand listening any more to their go away go away, because my drum was louder than their go away, because I wouldn't allow him to go away as Jan Bronski had always gone away from my mother; for Mama had always said go away to Jan and go away to Matzerath, go away, go away. And then they fell apart. But I couldn't bear to see it. After all, I hadn't gone away. That's why I am the father and not this Matzerath who to the last supposed himself to be my father. But my father was Jan Bronski. Jan Bronski got there ahead of Matzerath and didn't go away; he stayed right where he was and deposited everything he had; from Jan Bronski I inherited this quality of getting there ahead of Matzerath and staying put; what emerged was my son, not his son. He never had any son at all. He was no real father. Even if he had married my poor mama ten times over, even if he did marry Maria because she was pregnant. That, he thought, is certainly what the people in the neighborhood think. Of course they thought Matzerath had knocked up Maria and that's why he's marrying her though she's only seventeen and he's going on forty-five. But she's a mighty good worker for her age and as for little Oskar, he can be very glad to have such a stepmother, for Maria doesn't treat the poor child like a stepmother but like a real mother, even if little Oskar isn't quite right in the head and actually belongs in the nuthouse in Silberhammer or Tapiau.

On Gretchen Scheffler's advice, Matzerath decided to marry my sweetheart. If we think of this presumptive father of mine as my father, it follows inevitably that my father married my future wife, called my son Kurt his son Kurt, and expected me to acknowledge his grandson as my half-brother, to accept the presence of my darling vanilla-scented Maria as a stepmother and to tolerate her presence in his bed, which stank of fish roe. But if, more in conformance to the truth, I say: this Matzerath is not even your presumptive father, he is a total stranger to you, deserving neither to be liked nor disliked, who is a good cook, who with his good cooking has thus far been a father of sorts to you, because your poor mother handed him down to you, who now in

the eyes of all has purloined the best of women away from you, who compels you to witness his marriage and five months later a baptism, to play the role of guest at two family functions where you should properly have been the host, for *you* should have taken Maria to the City Hall, *you* should have picked the child's godfather and godmother. When I considered the miscasting of this tragedy, I had to despair of the theater, for Oskar, the real lead, had been cast in the role of an extra, that might just as well have been dropped.

Before I give my son the name of Kurt, before I name him as he should never have been named—for I would have named the boy after his great-grandfather Vincent Bronski—before I resign myself to Kurt, Oskar feels obliged to tell you how in the course of Maria's pregnancy he defended himself against the expected event.

On the evening of the very same day on which I surprised the two of them on the sofa, the day when I sat drumming on Matzerath's sweat-bathed back and frustrated the precautions demanded by Maria, I made a desperate attempt to win back my sweetheart.

Matzerath succeeded in shaking me off when it was already too late. As a result, he struck me. Maria took Oskar under her protection and reviled Matzerath for not taking care. Matzerath defended himself like an old man. It was Maria's fault, he protested, she should have been satisfied with once, but she never had enough. Maria wept and said with her things didn't go so quick, in and out before you can say Pilsener beer, he'd better get somebody else, yes, she admitted she was inexperienced but her sister Guste that was at the Eden knew what was what and she said it don't go so quick, Maria had better watch out, some men just wanted to shoot their snot, the sooner the better, and it looked like Matzerath was one of that kind, but he could count her out from now on, her bell had to ring too, like last time. But just the same he should have been careful, he owed her that much consideration. Then she cried some more and stayed sitting on the sofa. And Matzerath in his underdrawers shouted that he couldn't abide her wailing any more; then he was sorry he had lost his temper and blundered again, that is, he tried to pat her bare ass under her dress, and that really threw Maria into a tizzy.

Oskar had never seen her that way. Red spots came out all over her face and her grey eyes got darker and darker.

She called Matzerath a mollycoddle, whereupon he picked up his trousers, stepped in, and buttoned up. She screamed for all she was worth: he could clear out for all she cared, he could join his unit leaders, a bunch of quick-squirts the whole lot of them. Matzerath picked up his jacket and gripped the doorknob, there'd be changes, he assured her, he had women up to here; if she was so hot, why didn't she get her hooks on one of the foreign laborers, the Frenchie that brought the beer would surely do it better. To him, Matzerath, love meant something more than piggishness, he was going to shoot some skat, in a skat game at least you knew what to expect.

And then I was alone with Maria in the living room. She had stopped crying and was thoughtfully pulling on her panties, whistling, but very sparingly. For a long while she smoothed out her dress that had lain on the sofa. Then she turned on the radio and tried to listen to the announcement of the water level of the Vistula and Nogat. When, after announcing the level of the lower Mottlau, the speaker promised a waltz and his promise was directly kept, she suddenly removed her panties again, went into the kitchen, plunked down a basin, and turned the water on; I heard the puffing of the gas and guessed that Maria had decided to take a sitz bath.

In order to dispel this rather unpleasant image, Oskar concentrated on the strains of the waltz. If I remember aright, I even drummed a few measures of Strauss and enjoyed it. Then the waltz was broken off for a special communiqué. Oskar bet on news from the Atlantic and was not mistaken. Several U-boats had succeeded in sinking seven or eight ships of so and so many thousand tons off the west coast of Ireland. Another group of subs had sent almost as much tonnage to the bottom. A U-boat under Lieutenant Schepke—or it may have been Lieutenant Kretschmar, in any case it was one or the other of them unless it was a third equally famous submarine captain—had especially distinguished itself, sinking not only the most tonnage but also a British destroyer of the XY class.

While I on my drum picked up the ensuing "Sailing against England" and almost turned it into a waltz, Maria came into the living room with a Turkish towel under her arm. In an undertone she said: "Did you hear that, Oskar, another special communiqué. If they keep on like that . . ."

Without letting Oskar know what would happen if they kept on like that, Maria sat down in the chair on which

Matzerath customarily hung his jacket. She twisted the wet towel into a sausage and whistled "Sailing against England" along with the radio; she whistled loudly and in tune. She repeated the final chorus once more after it had stopped on the radio, and switched off the radio as soon as the strains of immortal waltz resumed. She left the sausaged towel on the table, sat down, and rested her sweet little hands on her thighs.

A deep silence fell in our living room, only the grandfather clock spoke louder and louder and Maria seemed to be wondering whether it might not be better to turn on the radio again. But then she made another decision. She pressed her face to the sausaged towel on the table, let her arms hang down between her knees to carpetward, and began, steadily and silently, to weep.

Oskar wondered if Maria was ashamed because of the embarrassing situation I had found her in. I decided to cheer her up; I crept out of the living room and in the dark shop, beside the waxed paper and packages of pudding, found a little package which in the corridor, where there was some light, proved to be a package of fizz powder with woodruff flavoring. Oskar was pleased with his blind choice, for at the time it seemed to me that Maria preferred woodruff to all other flavors.

When I entered the living room, Mari's right cheek still lay on the bunched-up towel. Her arms still dangled helplessly between her thighs. Oskar approached her from the left and was disappointed when he saw that her eyes were closed and dry. I waited patiently until her eyelids stickily opened, and held out the package, but she didn't notice the woodruff, she seemed to look through the package and Oskar too.

Her tears must have blinded her, I thought, for I wanted to forgive her; after a moment's deliberation, I decided on a more direct approach. Oskar crawled under the table, and huddled at Maria's feet—the toes were turned slightly inward—took one of her dangling hands, twisted it till I could see the palm, tore open the package with my teeth, strewn half the contents into the inert bowl, and contributed my salvia. Just as the powder began to foam, I received a sharp kick in the chest that sent Oskar sprawling under the table.

In spite of the pain I was on my feet in an instant and out from under the table. Maria stood up too, and we stood face to face, breathing hard. Maria picked up the towel,

wiped her hand clean, and flung the towel at my feet; she called me a loathsome pig, a vicious midget, a crazy gnome, that ought to be chucked in the nuthouse. She grabbed hold of me, slapped the back of my head, and reviled my poor mama for having brought a brat like me into the world. When I prepared to scream, having declared war on all the glass in the living room and in the whole world, she stuffed the towel in my mouth; I bit into it and it was tougher than tough boiled beef.

Only when Oskar made himself turn red and blue did she let me go. I might easily have screamed all the glasses and windowpanes in the room to pieces and repeated my childhood assault on the dial of the grandfather clock. I did not scream, I opened the gates of my heart to a hatred so deep-seated that to this day, whenever Maria comes into the room, I feel it between my teeth like that towel.

Capricious as Maria could be, she forgot her anger. She gave a good-natured laugh and with a single flip turned the radio back on again. Whistling the radio waltz, she came toward me, meaning to make up, to stroke my hair. The fact is that I liked her to stroke my hair.

Oskar let her come very close. Then with both fists he landed an uppercut in the exact same spot where she had admitted Matzerath. She caught my fists before I could strike again, whereupon I sank my teeth into the same accursed spot and, still clinging fast, fell with Maria to the sofa. I heard the radio promising another special communiqué, but Oskar had no desire to listen; consequently he cannot tell you who sank what or how much, for a violent fit of tears loosened my jaws and I lay motionless on Maria, who was crying with pain, while Oskar cried from hate and love, which turned to a leaden helplessness but could not die.

How Oskar Took His Helplessness to Mrs. Greff

I DIDN'T LIKE Greff. Greff didn't like me. Even later on, when Greff made me the drumming machine, I didn't like him. Lasting antipathies require a fortitude that Oskar hasn't really got, but I still don't care much for Greff, even now that Greff has gone out of existence.

Greff was a greengrocer. But don't be deceived. He believed neither in potatoes nor in cabbage, yet he knew a great deal about vegetable-raising and liked to think of himself as a gardener, a friend of nature, and a vegetarian. But precisely because Greff ate no meat, he was not an authentic greengrocer. It was impossible for him to talk about vegetables as vegetables. "Will you kindly look at this extraordinary potato," I often heard him say to a customer. "This swelling, bursting vegetable flesh, always devising new forms and yet so chaste. I love a potato because it speaks to me." Obviously, no real greengrocer will embarrass his customers with such talk. Even in the best potato years, my grandmother Anna Koljaiczek, who had grown old in potato fields, would never say anything more than: "Hm, the spuds are a little bigger than last year." Yet Anna Koljaiczek and her brother Vincent Bronski were far more dependent on the potato harvest than Greff, for in his line of business a good plum year could make up for a bad potato year.

Everything about Greff was overdone. Did he absolutely have to wear a green apron in the shop? The presumption of the man! The knowing smile he would put on to explain that this spinach-green rag of his was "God's green gardener's apron." Worst of all, he just couldn't give up boy-scouting. He had been forced to disband his group in '38—his boys had been put into brown shirts or dashing black winter uniforms—but the former scouts, in civilian clothes or in their new uniforms, came regularly to see their former scout leader, to sing morning songs, evening songs, hiking songs, soldier's songs, harvest songs, hymns to the Virgin, and folk songs native and foreign. Since Greff had joined the

National Socialist Motorists' Corps before it was too late and from 1941 on termed himself not only greengrocer but air raid warden as well; since, moreover, he had the support of two former scouts who had meanwhile made places for themselves, one as a squad leader, the other as a platoon leader, in the Hitler Youth, the song feasts in Greff's potato cellar were tolerated if not exactly authorized by the district bureau of the Party. Greff was even asked by Löbsack, the district chief of training, to organize song festivals during the training courses at Jenkau Castle. Early in 1940 Greff and a certain schoolteacher were commissioned to compile a young people's songbook for the district of Danzig-West Prussia, under the title: "Sing with Us." The book was quite a success. The greengrocer received a letter from Berlin, signed by the Reich Youth Leader, and was invited to attend a meeting of song leaders in Berlin.

Greff certainly had ability. He knew all the verses of all the songs; he could pitch tents, kindle and quench campfires without provoking forest fires, and find his way in the woods with a compass, he knew the first names of all the visible stars and could reel off no end of stories of both the funny and exciting variety; he knew the legends of the Vistula country and gave lectures on "Danzig and the Hanseatic League." He could list all the grand masters of the Teutonic Knights with the corresponding dates, and even that did not satisfy him; he could talk for hours about the Germanic mission in the territories of the Order, and it was only very rarely that locutions smacking too strongly of boy scout turned up in his lectures.

Greff liked young people. He liked boys more than girls. Actually he didn't like girls at all, just boys. Often he liked boys more than the singing of songs could express. Possibly it was Mrs. Greff, a sloven with greasy brassieres and holes in her underwear, who made him seek a purer measure of love among wiry, clean-cut boys. But perhaps, on the other hand, the tree on whose branches Mrs. Greff's dirty underwear blossomed at every season of the year had another root. Perhaps, that is, Mrs. Greff became a sloven because the greengrocer and air raid warden lacked sufficient appreciation of her carefree and rather stupid *embonpoint*.

Greff liked everything that was hard, taut, muscular. When he said "nature", he meant asceticism. When he said "asceticism", he meant a particular kind of physical culture. Greff was an expert on the subject of his body. He took elaborate

care of it, exposing it to heat and, with special inventiveness, to cold. While Oskar sang glass, far and near, to pieces, occasionally thawing the frost flowers on the windowpanes, melting icicles and sending them to the ground with a crash, the greengrocer was a man who attacked ice at close quarters, with hand tools.

Greff made holes in the ice. In December, January, February, he made holes in the ice with an ax. Long before dawn, he would haul his bicycle up from the cellar and wrap his ice ax in an onion sack. Then he would ride via Saspe to Brösen, whence he would take the snow-covered beach promenade in the direction of Glettkau. Between Brösen and Glettkau he would alight. As the day slowly dawned, he would push his bicycle over the icy beach, and then two or three hundred yards out into the frozen Baltic. The scene was immersed in coastal fog. No one could have seen from the beach how Greff laid down the bicycle, unwrapped the ax from the onion sack, and stood for a while in devout silence, listening to the foghorns of the icebound freighters in the roadstead. Then he would throw off his smock, do a bit of gymnastics, and finally begin, with steady, powerful strokes, to dig a circular hole in the Baltic Sea.

Greff needed a good three-quarters of an hour for his hole. Don't ask me, please, how I know. Oskar knew just about everything in those days, including the length of time it took Greff to dig his hole in the ice. Drops of salt sweat formed on his high, bumpy forehead and flew off into the snow. He handled his ax well; its strokes left a deep circular track. When the circle had come full circle, his gloveless hands lifted a disk, perhaps six or seven inches thick, out of the great sheet of ice that extended, it seems safe to say, as far as Hela if not Sweden. The water in the hole was old and grey, shot through with ice-grits. It steamed a bit, though it was not a hot spring. The hole attracted fish. That is, holes in the ice are said to attract fish. Greff might have caught lamprays or a twenty-pound cod. But he did not fish. He began to undress. He took off his clothes and he was soon stark naked, for Greff's nakedness was always stark.

Oskar is not trying to send winter shudders running down your spine. In view of the climate, he prefers to make a long story short: twice a week, during the winter months, Greff the greengrocer bathed in the Baltic. On Wednesday he bathed alone at the crack of dawn. He started off at six, arrived at half-past, and dug until a quarter past seven. Then

he tore off his clothes with quick, excessive movements, rubbed himself with snow, jumped into the hole, and, once in it, began to shout. Or sometimes I heard him sing: "Wild geese are flying through the night" or "Oh, how we love the storm. . . ." He sang, shouted, and bathed for two minutes, or three at most. Then with a single leap he was standing, terrifyingly distinct, on the ice: a steaming mass of lobstery flesh, racing round the hole, glowing, and still shouting. In the end, he was dressed once more and departing with his bicycle. Shortly before eight, he was back in Labesweg and his shop opened punctually.

Greff's other weekly bath was taken on Sunday, in the company of several boys, youths, striplings, or young men. This is something Oskar never saw or claimed to have seen. But the word got round. Meyn the musician knew stories about the greengrocer and trumpeted them all over the neighborhood. One of his trumpeter's tales was that every Sunday in the grimmiest winter months Greff bathed in the company of several boys. Yet even Meyn never claimed that Greff made the boys jump naked into the hole in the ice like himself. He seems to have been perfectly satisfied if, lithe and sinewy, they tumbled and gamboled about on the ice, half-naked or mostly naked, and rubbed each other with snow. So appealing to Greff were striplings in the snow that he often romped with them before or after his bath, helped them with their reciprocal rubdowns, or allowed the entire horde to rub him down. Meyn the musician claimed that despite the perpetual fog he once saw from the Glettkau beach promenade how an appallingly naked, singing, shouting Greff lifted up two of his naked disciples and, naked laden with naked, a roaring, frenzied troika raced headlong over the solidly frozen surface of the Baltic.

It is easy to guess that Greff was not a fisherman's son, although there were plenty of fishermen named Greff in Brösen and Neufahrwasser. Greff the greengrocer hailed from Tiegenhof, but he had met Lina Greff, née Bartsch, at Praust. There he had helped an enterprising young vicar to run an apprentices' club, and Lina, on the same vicar's account, went to the parish house every Saturday. To judge by a snapshot, which she must have given me, for it is still in my album, Lina, at the age of twenty, was robust, plump, light-headed, and dumb. Her father raised fruit and vegetables on a considerable market garden at Sankt Albrecht. As she later related on every possible occasion, she was quite

inexperienced when at the age of twenty-three she married Greff on the vicar's advice. With her father's money they opened the vegetable store in Langfuhr. Since her father provided them with a large part of their vegetables and nearly all their fruit at low prices, the business virtually ran itself and Greff could do little damage.

Without Greff's childish tendency to invent mechanical contrivances, he could easily have made a gold mine of this store, so well situated, so far removed from all competition, in a suburb swarming with children. But when the inspector from the Bureau of Weights and Measures presented himself for the third or fourth time, checked the scales, confiscated the weights, and decreed an assortment of fines, some of Greff's regular customers left him and took to buying at the market. There was nothing wrong with the quality of Greff's vegetables, they said, and his prices were not too high, but the inspectors had been there again, and something fishy must be going on.

Yet I am certain Greff had no intention of cheating anyone. This is what had happened: After Greff had made certain changes in his big potato scales, they weighed to his disadvantage. Consequently, just before the war broke out, he equipped these self-same scales with a set of chimes which struck up a tune after every weighing operation; what tune depended on the weight registered. A customer who bought twenty pounds of potatoes was regaled, as a kind of premium, with "On the Sunny Shores of the Saale"; fifty pounds of potatoes got you "Be True and Upright to the Grave", and a hundredweight of winter potatoes made the chimes intone the naïvely bewitching strains of "Ännchen von Tharau."

Though I could easily see that these musical fancies might not be to the liking of the Bureau of Weights and Measures, Oskar was all in favor of the greengrocer's little hobbies. Even Lina Greff was indulgent about her husband's eccentricities, because, well, because the essence and content of the Greff marriage was forbearance with each other's foibles. In this light the Greff marriage may be termed a good marriage. Greff did not beat his wife, was never unfaithful to her with other women, and was neither a drinker nor a debauchee; he was a good-humored man who dressed carefully and was well liked for his sociable, helpful ways, not only by lads and striplings but also by those of his customers who went on taking music with their potatoes.

And so Greff looked on calmly and indulgently as his Lina from year to year became an increasingly foul-smelling sloven. I remember seeing him smile when sympathetic friends called a sloven a sloven. Blowing into and rubbing his own hands, which were nicely kept in spite of the potatoes, he would sometimes, in my hearing, say to Matzerath, who had been chiding him over his wife: "Of course you're perfectly right, Alfred. Our good Lina does rather let herself go. But haven't we all got our faults?" If Matzerath persisted, Greff would close the discussion in a firm though friendly tone: "You may be right on certain points, but Lina has a good heart. I know my Lina."

Maybe he did. But she knew next to nothing of him. Like the neighbors and customers, she never saw anything more in Greff's relations with his frequent youthful visitors than the enthusiasm of young men for a devoted, though non-professional, friend and educator of the young.

As for me, Greff could neither educate me nor fire me with enthusiasm. Actually Oskar was not his type. If I had made up my mind to grow, I might have become his type, for my lean and lank son Kurt is the exact embodiment of Greff's type, though he takes mostly after Maria, bears little resemblance to me, and none whatever to Matzerath.

Greff was one witness to the marriage of Maria Truczinski and Alfred Matzerath; the other was Fritz Truczinski, home on furlough. Since Maria, like the bridegroom, was a Protestant, they only had a civil marriage. That was in the middle of December. Matzerath said "I do" in his Party uniform. Maria was in her third month.

The stouter my sweetheart became, the more Oskar's hate mounted. I had no objection to her being pregnant. But that the fruit by me engendered should one day bear the name of Matzerath deprived me of all pleasure in my anticipated son and heir. Maria was in her fifth month when I made my first attempt at abortion, much too late of course. It was in Carnival. Maria was fastening some paper streamers and clown's masks with potato noses to the brass bar over the counter, where the sausage and bacon were hung. Ordinarily the ladder had solid support in the shelves; now it was propped up precariously on the counter. Maria high above with her hands full of streamers, Oskar far below, at the foot of the ladder. Using my drumsticks as levers, helping with my shoulder and firm resolve, I raised the foot of the ladder, then pushed it to one side: amid streamers and masks, Maria

let out a faint cry of terror. The ladder tottered, Oskar jumped to one side, and beside him fell Maria, drawing colored paper, sausages, and masks in her wake.

It looked worse than it was. She had only turned her ankle, she had to lie down and be careful, but there was no serious injury. Her shape grew worse and worse and she didn't even tell Matzerath who had been responsible for her turned ankle.

It was not until May of the following year when, some three weeks before the child was scheduled to be born, I made my second try, that she spoke to Matzerath, her husband, though even then she didn't tell him the whole truth. At table, right in front of me, she said: "Oskar has been awful rough these days. Sometimes he hits me in the belly. Maybe we could leave him with my mother until the baby gets born. She has plenty of room."

Matzerath heard and believed. In reality, a fit of murderous frenzy had brought on a very different sort of encounter between Maria and me.

She had lain down on the sofa after lunch. Matzerath had finished washing the dishes and was in the shop decorating the window. It was quiet in the living room. Maybe the buzzing of a fly, the clock as usual, on the radio a newscast about the exploits of the paratroopers on Crete had been turned low. I perked up an ear only when they put on Max Schmeling, the boxer. As far as I could make out, he had hurt his world's champion's ankle, landing on the stony soil of Crete, and now he had to lie down and take care of himself; just like Maria, who had had to lie down after her fall from the ladder. Schmeling spoke with quiet modesty, then some less illustrious paratroopers spoke, and Oskar stopped listening: it was quiet, maybe the buzzing of a fly, the clock as usual, the radio turned very low.

I sat by the window on my little bench and observed Maria's belly on the sofa. She breathed heavily and kept her eyes closed. From time to time I tapped my drum morosely. She didn't stir, but still she made me breathe in the same room with her belly. The clock was still there, and the fly between windowpane and curtain, and the radio with the stony island of Crete in the background. But quickly all this was submerged; all I could see was that belly; I knew neither in what room that bulging belly was situated, nor to whom it belonged, I hardly remembered who had made it so big. All I knew was that I couldn't bear it: it's got to be sup-

pressed, it's a mistake, it's cutting off your view, you've got to stand up and do something about it. So I stood up. You've got to investigate, to see what can be done. So I approached the belly and took something with me. That's a malignant swelling, needs to be deflated. I lifted the object I had taken with me and looked for a spot between Maria's hands that lay breathing with her belly. Now is the time, Oskar, or Maria will open her eyes. Already I felt that I was being watched, but I just stood gazing at Maria's slightly trembling left hand, though I saw her right hand moving, saw she was planning something with her right hand, and was not greatly surprised when Maria, with her right hand, twisted the scissors out of Oskar's fist. I may have stood there for another few seconds with hand upraised but empty, listening to the clock, the fly, the voice of the radio announcer announcing the end of the Crete program, then I turned about and before the next program—light music from two to three—could begin, left our living room, which in view of that space-filling abdomen had become too small for me.

Two days later Maria bought me a new drum and took me to Mother Truczinski's third-floor flat, smelling of ersatz coffee and fried potatoes. At first I slept on the couch; for fear of lingering vanilla Oskar refused to sleep in Herbert's old bed. A week later old man Heilandt carried my wooden crib up the stairs. I allowed them to set it up beside the bed which had harbored me, Maria, and our fizz powder.

Oskar grew calmer or more resigned at Mother Truczinski's. I was spared the sight of the belly, for Maria feared to climb the stairs. I avoided our apartment, the store, the street, even the court, where rabbits were being raised again as food became harder to come by.

Oskar spent most of his time looking at the postcards that Sergeant Fritz Truczinski had sent or brought with him from Paris. I had my ideas about the city of Paris and when Mother Truczinski brought me a postcard of the Eiffel Tower, I took up the theme and began to drum Paris, to drum a musette though I had never heard one.

On June 12, two weeks too soon according to my calculations, in the sign of Gemini and not as I had reckoned in that of Cancer, my son Kurt was born. The father in a Jupiter year, the son in a Venus year. The father dominated by Mercury in Virgo, which makes for skepticism and ingenuity; the son likewise governed by Mercury but in the sign of Gemini, hence endowed with a cold, ambitious intelligence.

came mock turtle soup. The countryfolk lapped. Greff crooked his little finger. Gretchen Scheffler bit into the soup. Guste smiled broadly over her spoon. Ehlers spoke with the spoon in his mouth. Vincent's hands shook as he looked for something that wouldn't come into the spoon. Only the old women, Grandma Anna and Mother Truczinski, were committed heart and soul to their spoons. As for Oskar, he dropped his and slipped away while the others were still spooning and sought out his son's cradle in the bedroom, for he wanted to think about his son, while the others, behind their spoons, shriveled more and more into unthinking, spooned-out emptiness, even though the soup was being spooned, not out of, but into them.

Over the basket on wheels a sky-blue canopy of tulle. The edge of the basket was too high and all I could see at first was a puckered little reddish-bluish head. By laying my drum on the floor and standing on it, I was able to observe my sleeping son, who twitched nervously as he slept. O paternal pride, ever on the lookout for grand words! Gazing upon my infant son, I could think of nothing but the short sentence: When he is three years old, he shall have a drum. My son refused to grant me the slightest insight into his intellectual situation, and I could only hope that he might, like me, belong to the race of clairaudient infants. Quite at a loss, I repeated my promise of a drum for his third birthday, descended from my pedestal, and once more tried my chance with the grownups in the living room.

The were just finishing the mock turtle soup. Maria brought in canned green peas with melted butter. Matzerath, who was responsible for the pork roast, dressed the platter in person; he took his coat off and, standing in his shirtsleeves, cut slice after slice, his features so full of unabashed tenderness over the tender, succulent meat that I had to avert my eyes.

Greff was served separately: he was given canned asparagus, hard-boiled eggs, and black radish with cream, because vegetarians eat no meat. Like the others, he took a dab of mashed potatoes: however, he moistened them not with meat gravy but with brown butter which the attentive Maria brought in from the kitchen in a sizzling frying pan. While the others drank beer, he drank apple juice. The encirclement of Kiev was discussed, the prisoners taken counted on fingers. Ehlers, a native of the Baltic, showed a

special aptitude for counting Russian prisoners; at every hundred thousand, a finger shot up; when his two outstretched hands had completed a million, he went right on counting by decapitating one finger after another. When the subject of prisoners, whose mounting numbers made them increasingly useless and uninteresting, was exhausted, Schefler spoke of the U-boats at Gotenhafen and Matzerath whispered in my grandmother Anna's ear that they were launching two subs a week at Schichau. Thereupon Greff explained to all present why submarines had to be launched sideways instead of stern first. He was determined to make it all very clear and visual; for every operation he had a gesture which those of the guests who were fascinated by U-boats imitated attentively and awkwardly. Trying to impersonate a diving submarine, Vincent Bronski's left hand upset his beer glass. My grandmother started to scold him. But Maria smoothed her down, saying it didn't matter, the tablecloth was due for the laundry anyway, you couldn't celebrate without making spots. Mother Truczinski came in with a cloth and mopped up the pool of beer; in her left hand she carried our large crystal bowl, full of chocolate pudding with crushed almonds.

Ah me, if that chocolate pudding had only had some other sauce or no sauce at all! But it had to be vanilla sauce, rich and yellow and viscous: vanilla sauce! Perhaps there is nothing so joyous and nothing so sad in this world as vanilla sauce. Softly the vanilla scent spread round about, enveloping me more and more in Maria, to the point that I couldn't bear to look at her, root and source of all vanilla, who sat beside Matzerath, holding his hand in hers.

Oskar slipped off his baby chair, clung to the skirts of Lina Greff, lay at her feet as above board she wielded her spoon. For the first time I breathed in the effluvium peculiar to Lina Greff, which instantly outshouted, engulfed, and killed all vanilla.

Acrid as it was to my nostrils, I clung to the new perfume until all recollections connected with vanilla seemed to be dulled. Slowly, without the slightest sound or spasm, I was seized with a redeeming nausea. While the mock turtle soup, the roast pork in chunks, the canned green peas almost intact, and the few spoonfuls I had taken of chocolate pudding with vanilla sauce escaped me, I became full

aware of my helplessness, I wallowed in my helplessness. Oskar's helplessness spread itself out at the feet of Lina Greff—and I decided that from then on and daily I should carry my helplessness to Lina Greff.

165 lbs.

VYAZMA AND BRYANSK; then the mud set in. In the middle of October, 1941, Oskar too began to wallow intensively in mud. I hope I shall be forgiven for drawing a parallel between the muddy triumphs of Army Group Center and my own triumphs in the impassable and equally muddy terrain of Mrs. Lina Greff. Just as tanks and trucks bogged down on the approaches to Moscow, so I too bogged down; just as the wheels went on spinning, churning up the mud of Russia, so I too kept on trying—I feel justified in saying that I churned the Greffian mud into a foaming lather—but neither on the approaches to Moscow nor in the Greff bedroom was any ground gained.

I am not quite ready to drop my military metaphor: just as future strategists would draw a lesson from these unsuccessful operations in the mud, so I too would draw my conclusions from the natural phenomenon named Lina Greff. Our efforts on the home front during the Second World War should not be underestimated. Oskar was only seventeen, and despite his tender years Lina Greff, that endless and insidious infiltration course, made a man of him. But enough of military comparisons. Let us measure Oskar's progress in artistic terms: If Maria, with her naïvely bewitching clouds of vanilla, taught me to appreciate the small, the delicate; if she taught me the lyricism of fizz powder and mushroom-picking, then Mrs. Greff's acrid vapors, compounded of multiple effluvia, may be said to have given me the broad epic breath which enables me today to mention military victories and bedroom triumphs in the same breath. Music! From Maria's childlike, sentimental, and yet so sweet harmonica I was transported, without transition, to the concert hall, and I was the conductor; for Lina Greff offered me an orchestra, so graduated in depth and breadth that you will hardly find its equal in Bayreuth or Salzburg. There I mastered brasses and wood winds, the percussion, the strings, bowed and pizzicato; I mastered harmony and counterpoint, classical and diatonic, the entry of the scherzo

to empty, he played the most popular hits of the war years; he played "Erika" and "Mamatchi, Give Me a Horse"; he made the "Stars of the Homeland" twinkle and rescued from the bottlenecks, and when that didn't quite take, fell back on his old standby: "Jimmy the Tiger" roared and roared among the bottles. That appealed to the soldiers and even to Oskar's jaded ear; and when after a few ridiculous but successful tricks of magic Bebra announced Roswitha Raguna the great somnambulist and Oskarnello Raguna the glass-slaying drummer, the audience was nicely warmed up: the success of Roswitha and Oskarnello was assured. I introduced our performance with a light roll on my drum, led up to the climaxes with crescendo rolls, and after each phase invited applause with a loud and accurately timed boom. Raguna would invite a soldier, even an officer or two, to step forward; she would bid a leathery old corporal or a bashfully cocky young ensign sit down beside her. And then she would look into his heart—yes, Raguna saw into the hearts of men. She would reveal not only the data, always correct, out of her subject's paybook, but details of his intimate life as well. Her indiscretions were always full of delicacy and wit. In conclusion she rewarded one of her victims with a bottle of beer and asked him to hold it up high so the audience could see it. Then she gave me, Oskarnello, the signal: my drum rolled crescendo and I lifted up my voice, a voice designed for far more exacting tasks. It was child's play to shatter that beer bottle, not without a resounding explosion: the bewildered, beer-bespattered face of a case-hardened corporal or of a milk-faced ensign—I don't remember which—wrote finis to our act—and then came applause, long and thunderous, mingled with the sounds of a major air raid on the capital.

Our offering was hardly in the international class, but it entertained the men. It made them forget the front and the furlough that was ended, and it made them laugh and laugh; for when the aerial torpedoes landed overhead, shaking and burying the cellar and everything in it, dousing the light and the emergency light, when everything about us was tossed topsy-turvy, laughter still rang through the dark, stifling coffin, accompanied by cries of "Bebra! We want Bebra!" And good old indestructible Bebra spoke up, played the clown in the darkness, wrung volleys of laughter from the buried mob. And when voices demanded Raguna and Oskarnello, he blared out: "Signora Raguna is vermy tired,

spent most of our time inland and saw little of the legendary pillboxes. It wasn't until Trouville that we played directly on the coast. Here we were offered an opportunity to visit the Atlantic Wall. Bebra accepted. After our last show in Trouville, we were driven to the village of Bavent near Caen, three miles behind the shore dunes. We were lodged with peasants. Pasture, hedgerows, apple trees. That is where the apple brandy called calvados is distilled. We had a drink of it and went to bed. Brisk air came in through the window, a frog pond croaked until morning. Some frogs are good drummers. I heard them in my sleep and said to myself: Oskar, you've got to go home, soon your son Kurt will be three years old, you've got to give him his drum, you've promised. Thus admonished, Oskar, the tormented father, awoke each hour, groped about in the darkness, made sure his Roswitha was there, breathed in her smell: Raguna smelled ever so slightly of cinnamon, crushed cloves, and nutmeg; even in summer she had that scent of Christmas, of cake spice.

In the morning an armored personnel carrier drove up to the farm. We stood in the doorway, chatting into the sea wind, all of us shivering a little. It was early and very chilly. We got in: Bebra, Raguna, Felix and Kitty, Oskar, and a Lieutenant Herzog who was taking us to his battery west of Bourg.

To say Normandy is green is to disregard the spotted brown and white cows which were chewing their cud on misty meadows, wet with dew, to the right and left of the straight highway, greeted our armored vehicle with such indifference that the armor plate would have turned red with shame had it not previously been daubed with camouflage paint. Poplars, hedgerows, creepers, the first hulking beach hotels, empty, their shutters clattering in the wind. We turned into the beach promenade, got out, and plodded along behind the lieutenant, who showed Captain Bebra a condescending yet properly military respect, across the dunes, against a wind full of sand and surf roar.

This wasn't the mild, bottle-green Baltic, sobbing like a tenderhearted maiden as it waited for me to come in. It was the Atlantic carrying out its immemorial maneuver, pressing forward at high tide, receding at low tide.

And then we had our concrete. We could admire it and even pat it to our heart's content; it didn't budge. "Attention!" cried someone inside the concrete and leapt, tall as a mast, from the pillbox, which was shaped like a flattened-

out turtle, lay amid sand dunes, was called "Dora Seven", and looked out upon the shifting tides through gun embrasures, observation slits, and machine-gun barrels. The man's name was Corporal Lankes. He reported to Lieutenant Herzog and at the same time to our Captain Bebra.

LANKES (*saluting*): Dora Seven, one corporal and four men. Nothing special to report.

HERZOG: Thank you. At ease, Corporal Lankes. Did you hear that, Captain? Nothing special to report. That's how it's been for years.

BEBRA: There's still the tide. Ebbing and flowing. Nature's contribution.

HERZOG: That's just what keeps our men busy. That's why we go on building pillboxes one after another. They're already in each other's field of fire. Pretty soon we'll have to demolish a few of them to make room for more concrete.

BEBRA (*knocks on the concrete; the members of his troupe do likewise*): And you have faith in concrete?

HERZOG: Faith is hardly the right word. We haven't much faith in anything any more. What do you say, Lankes?

LANKES: Right, sir. No more faith.

BEBRA: But they keep on mixing and pouring.

HERZOG: Between you and me, Captain, we're getting valuable experience. I'd never built a thing until I came here. I was in school when the war started. Now I've learned a thing or two about cement and I hope to make use of it after the war. The whole of Germany is going to have to be rebuilt. Take a good look at this concrete. (*Bebra and his troupe poke their noses into the concrete.*) What do you see? Shells. We've got all we need right at the doorstep. Just have to take the stuff and mix. Stones, shells, sand, cement . . . What else can I tell you, Captain, you are an artist, you know how it is. Lankes, tell the captain what we put in our cement.

LANKES: Yes, sir. I'll tell the captain. Puppies, sir. Every one of our pillboxes has a puppy in it. Walled up in the foundation.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: A puppy?

LANKES: Pretty soon there won't be a single puppy left in the whole sector from Caen to Le Havre.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: No more puppies.

LANKES: That's what eager beavers we are.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: What eager beavers!

LANKES: Pretty soon we'll have to use kittens.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: Meow!

LANKES: But cats aren't as good as dogs. That's why we hope there'll be a little action here soon.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: The big show! (*They applaud.*)

LANKES: We've rehearsed enough. And if we run out of puppies . . .

BEBRA'S TROUPE: Oh!

LANKES: . . . we'll have to stop building. Cats are bad luck.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: Meow! Meow!

LANKES: Would you like me to tell you short and sweet why we put in puppies . . .

BEBRA'S TROUPE: Puppies!

LANKES: Personally I think it's the bunk . . .

BEBRA'S TROUPE: For shame!

LANKES: But my buddies, here, are mostly from the country. And in the country when they build a house or a barn or a village church, it's the custom to put something living in the foundations . . . and . . .

HERZOG: That's enough, Lankes. At ease. As you've heard, sir, we're given to superstition here on the Atlantic Wall. Like you theater people who mustn't whistle before an opening night or spit over your shoulders before the curtain goes up . . .

BEBRA'S TROUPE: *Toi-toi-toi! (Spit over each other's shoulders.)*

HERZOG: But joking aside, we've got to let the men have their fun. Recently they've started decorating the entrances to the pillboxes with improvisations in concrete or sea-shell mosaics, and it's tolerated by order from way up. The men like to be kept busy. Those concrete pretzels get on our C.O.'s nerves, but what I tell him is: better pretzels in the concrete, sir, than pretzels in the head. We Germans are no good at sitting idle. That's a fact.

BEBRA: And we, too, do our bit to distract the men who are waiting on the Atlantic Wall . . .

BEBRA'S TROUPE: Bebra's front-line theater sings for you, plays for you, boosts your morale for the final victory.

HERZOG: Yes, you've got the right point of view. But the theater alone isn't enough. Most of the time we have only ourselves to depend on, and we do our best. Am I right, Lankes?

LANKES: Right, sir. We do our best.

HERZOG: There you have it. And if you'll excuse me now, sir, I've got to take a run over to Dora Four and Dora Five. Take your time, have a good look at our concrete. It's worth it. Lankes will show you everything . . .

LANKES: Everything, sir.

(Lankes and Bebra exchange salutes. Herzog goes out right, Raguna, Oskar, Felix, and Kitty, who have thus far been standing behind Bebra, jump out. Oskar is holding his drum, Raguna is carrying a basket of provisions. Felix and Kitty climb up on the concrete roof of the pillbox and begin doing acrobatic exercises. Oskar and Raguna play with pails and shovels, make it plain that they are in love, yodel, and tease Felix and Kitty.)

BEBRA *(wearily, after examining the pillbox from all sides)*:

Tell me, Corporal, what is your civilian occupation?

LANKES: Painter, sir, but that was a long time ago.

BEBRA: House painter?

LANKES: Houses too, but mostly pictures.

BEBRA: Hear, hear! You mean you emulated the great Rembrandt, or maybe Velasquez?

LANKES: Sort of in between.

BEBRA: Why, good God, man! Why are you mixing, pouring, guarding concrete? You ought to be in the Propaganda Company. Why, a war artist is just what we need!

LANKES: It's not my line, sir. My stuff slants too much for present tastes. But if you've got a cigarette . . .

(Bebra hands him a cigarette.)

BEBRA: Slants? I suppose you mean it's modern?

LANKES: What do you mean by modern? Well, anyway, before they started up with their concrete, slanting was modern for a while.

BEBRA: Oh.

LANKES: Yep.

BEBRA: I guess you lay it on thick. With a trowel maybe?

LANKES: Yeah, I do that too. I stick my thumb in, automatic like, I put in nails and buttons, and before '33 I had a period when I put barbed wire on cinnabar. Got good reviews. A private collector in Switzerland has them now. Makes soap.

BEBRA: Oh, this war! This awful war! And today you're pouring concrete. Hiring out your genius for fortification work. Well, I've got to admit, Leonardo and Michelangelo did the same thing in their day. Designed military ma-

a soft-boiled Danish egg, a spot of Soviet caviar, and a little cup of genuine Dutch chocolate.

LANKES: Yes, sir. (*He joins the others on top of the pill-box.*)

BEBRA: Haven't we another cushion for the corporal?

OSKAR: He can have mine. I'll sit on my drum.

ROSWITHA: Mustn't catch cold, precious. Concrete is treacherous, and you're not used to it.

KITTY: He can have my cushion too. I'll just knot myself up a little, it helps my digestion anyway.

FELIX: But do eat over the tablecloth or you'll get honey on the concrete. We wouldn't want to damage the defenses! (*All giggle.*)

BEBRA: Ah, the sea air! How fine it makes us feel.

ROSWITHA: Feel!

BEBRA: The breast expands.

ROSWITHA: Expands!

BEBRA: The heart casts off its crust.

ROSWITHA: Crust!

BEBRA: The soul is reborn.

ROSWITHA: Reborn!

BEBRA: The eyes soar aloft.

ROSWITHA: Aloft!

BEBRA: Over the sea, the endless sea . . . I say, Corporal, I see something black down there on the beach. Whatever it is, there's five of them.

KITTY: So do I. With five umbrellas.

FELIX: Six.

KITTY: Five! One, two, three, four, five!

LANKES: It's the nuns from Lisieux. They've been evacuated and shipped over here with their kindergarten.

KITTY: I don't see any children. Just five umbrellas.

LANKES: They leave the children at Bavent. Sometimes they come down here at low tide to pick up the crabs and shellfish that get stuck in the Rommel asparagus.

KITTY: Poor things!

ROSWITHA: Shouldn't we offer them some corned beef and cookies?

OSKAR: I suggest raisin bread with plum jam. It's Friday; nuns aren't allowed to eat corned beef on Friday.

KITTY: They're running now. They seem to be gliding on their umbrellas.

LANKES: They always do that when they've finished picking. Then they begin to play. Especially Agneta, the novice,

she's just a kid that doesn't know which way is up. Maybe you could spare another cigarette? Thank you, sir. And the one back there, the fat one that isn't running is Scholastica, the mother superior. She doesn't like them to play on the beach, she thinks it might be against the rule of their order.

(Nuns with umbrellas are seen running in the background. Roswitha puts on the gramophone: "Sleigh Bells in St. Petersburg." The nuns dance and shout.)

AGNETA: Yoohoo, Sister Scholastica!

SCHOLASTICA: Agneta, Sister Agneta!

AGNETA: Yoohoo, Sister Scholastica!

SCHOLASTICA: Come back now, child! Sister Agneta!

AGNETA: I can't. It carries me away.

SCHOLASTICA: Then you must pray, sister, for a conversion.

AGNETA: A sorrowful one?

SCHOLASTICA: A merciful one.

AGNETA: A joyful one?

SCHOLASTICA: Just pray, Sister Agneta!

AGNETA: I'm praying to beat the band. But I'm still being carried away.

SCHOLASTICA *(her voice dying away in the distance)*: Agneta, Sister Agneta.

AGNETA: Yoohoo, Sister Scholastica!

(The nuns disappear, but from time to time their umbrellas appear in the background. The phonograph record runs down. Beside the pillbox entrance the telephone rings. Lankes jumps down and picks up the receiver, the others go on eating.)

ROSWITHA: Telephones, telephones, wherever you go. Between the sea and the sky, telephones.

LANKES: Dora Seven speaking. Corporal Lankes.

HERZOG *(comes in slowly from the right, holding a telephone and dragging the wire after him. He stops repeatedly and talks into the phone)*: Are you asleep, Lankes? There's something moving in front of Dora Seven. I'm sure of it.

LANKES: It's the nuns, sir.

HERZOG: What are nuns doing down there? And suppose they're not nuns.

LANKES: But they are nuns. I can see them plain as day.

HERZOG: Never hear of camouflage? Never hear of the fifth column? The English have been at it for centuries.

They come in with their Bibles and before you know what they're up to, boom!

LANKES: They're picking up crabs, sir . . .

HERZOG: I want that beach cleared immediately. Is that clear?

LANKES: Yes, sir, but they're just picking up crabs.

HERZOG: Lankes, I want you to get your ass behind your MG!

LANKES: But suppose they're just looking for crabs, 'cause it's low tide and the children in their kindergarten . . .

HERZOG: That's an official order, Lankes.

LANKES: Yes, sir. (*Lankes disappears into the pillbox. Herzog goes out right with the telephone.*)

OSKAR: Roswitha, stop your ears, there's going to be shooting like in the newsreels.

KITTY: Oh, how awful! I'm going to knot myself still tighter.

BEBRA: I myself am almost inclined to think that we shall soon hear some noise.

FELIX: Let's put on another record. That will help some. (*He puts on the gramophone: The Platters singing "The Great Pretender." The rat-tat-tat of the machine gun punctuates the slow mournful music. Roswitha holds her ears. Felix stands on his head. In the background five nuns with umbrellas are seen flying heavenward. The record sticks in its groove and repeats. Felix returns to his feet. Kitty unties herself. Roswitha begins to clear the table and repack her basket. Oskar and Bebra help her. They leave the roof of the pillbox. Lankes appears in the entrance.*)

LANKES: Captain, sir, if you could spare another cigarette . . .

BEBRA (*his frightened troupe huddle behind him*): You smoke too much, Corporal.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: He smokes too much.

LANKES: That's on account of the concrete, sir.

BEBRA: And suppose some day there's no more concrete?

BEBRA'S TROUPE: No more concrete.

LANKES: Concrete is immortal, sir. Just us and our cigarettes . . .

BEBRA: I know, I know, we vanish like a puff of smoke.

BEBRA'S TROUPE (*slowly going out*): Smoke!

BEBRA: But in a thousand years they will still be coming to see the concrete.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: In a thousand years!

BEBRA: They'll find puppy bones.

BEBRA'S TROUPE: Puppy bones.

BEBRA: And your Oblique Formations in the concrete.
BEBRA'S TROUPE: BARBARIC, MYSTICAL, BORED!
(*Lankes is left alone, smoking.*)

Though Oskar hardly opened his mouth in the course of that breakfast on the concrete, the mere fact that such words should be spoken on the eve of the invasion has impelled me to record them. Moreover, we haven't seen the last of Corporal Lankes, the master of "concrete" art; we shall meet him again when the time comes to speak of the postwar period and the present apotheosis of bourgeois comfort.

On the beach promenade, our armored personnel carrier was still waiting for us. With long strides Lieutenant Herzog returned to his protégés and breathlessly apologized to Bebra for the little incident, adding, however, that the beach was off limits for civilians and "Off limits is off limits." He helped the ladies into the vehicle, gave the driver some instructions, and back we rode to Bavent. We had to hurry, there was no time for lunch, for at two o'clock we had a show at the charming little Norman château nestling among the poplars at the edge of the village.

We had barely half an hour in which to test the lighting; then Oskar raised the curtain with a drum flourish. We were playing to an audience of enlisted men. We laid it on thick and the laughter was hearty and frequent. I sang at a glass chamber pot containing a pair of hot dogs with mustard. Bebra, in white grease paint, wept clown's tears over the broken pot, salvaged the sausages from the shards, and devoured them to the joy of the field-grey mass. Felix and Kitty had taken to appearing in leather shorts and Tyrolean hats, which lent their act a special cachet. Roswitha wore a close-fitting silvery gown and long pale-green gloves; her tiny feet were encased in gold-embroidered sandals. Her half-closed bluish eyelids and drowsy Mediterranean voice produced their usual effect of eerie magic. Oskar—or have I mentioned it before?—required no special costume. I wore my good old sailor hat with S.M.S. *Seydlitz* on the band, my navy-blue shirt, and my jacket with the golden anchor buttons. As the camera eye descended, it registered the bottoms of my knee-pants, rolled stockings, and a very dilapidated pair of boots. From my neck hung my red and white lacquered drum, serene in the knowledge that there were five more like it in my luggage.

That night we repeated the same show for officers and for the Blitz Girls from the Cabourg message center. Roswitha was a trifle nervous. She made no mistakes, but in the middle of her number she put on a pair of sunglasses with blue rims and abruptly changed her tone. Her revelations became more direct; for instance, she informed an anemic-looking Blitz Girl, whose embarrassment made her snippish, that she was having an affair with her commanding officer. This, it seemed to me, was in poor taste, but there were plenty of laughs, for there was an officer sitting beside the Blitz Girl, and there was good reason to suppose . . .

After the show the regimental staff officers, who were billeted in the château, gave a party. Bebra, Kitty, and Felix stayed on, but Raguna and Oskar slipped quietly away and went to bed. It had been a trying day. We dropped off quickly and slept until 5 A.M. when the invasion woke us up.

What shall I tell you about the invasion? Canadians landed in our sector, not far from the mouth of the Orne. Bavent had to be evacuated. Our luggage was already stowed in the truck. We were pulling out with the regimental staff. A motorized field kitchen had stopped in the court of the château. Roswitha asked me to get her a cup of coffee. Rather nervous and afraid of missing the truck, I refused. I was even a little rude to her. Thereupon she herself ran over to the field kitchen in her high-heeled shoes, and reached the steaming hot coffee exactly at the same time as a shell from a naval gun.

O Roswitha, I know not how old you were, I know only that you measured three foot three, that the Mediterranean spoke from your lips, that you smelled of cinnamon and nutmeg, and that you could see into the hearts of men; but you couldn't see into your own heart, or else you would have stayed with me instead of running after that coffee, which was much too hot.

In Lisieux Bebra managed to wangle marching orders for Berlin. We waited for him outside the Kommandantur, and it was only when he joined us that he mentioned Roswitha's death for the first time: "We dwarfs and fools have no business dancing on concrete made for giants. If only we had stayed under the rostrums where no one suspected our presence!"

In Berlin I parted from Bebra. "What," he said with a smile as thin as a spiderweb, "will you do in all those air-raid shelters without your Roswitha?" Then he kissed me on

the forehead. He made me a present of the five remaining drums and sent Kitty and Felix to Danzig with official travel orders to keep me company. So it was that armed with six drums and my "book", I returned on June 11, 1944, the day before my son's third birthday, to my native city, which was still intact and medieval and which still resounded with bells of every size ringing out the hour from belfries high and low.

The Imitation of Christ

AH, YES, HOMECOMING! At four minutes after twenty hundred, the furlough train pulled into Danzig station. Felix and Kitty accompanied me as far as Max-Halbe-Platz. Kitty burst into tears as they were saying goodbye. Then—it was almost twenty-one hundred—they went on to Propaganda Troop headquarters in Hochstriess, while Oskar toted his luggage down Labesweg.

Homecoming indeed! Nowadays every young man who forges a little check, joins the Foreign Legion, and spins a few yarns when he gets home a few years later, tends to be regarded as a modern Ulysses. Maybe on his way home our young man gets into the wrong train which takes him to Oberhausen instead of Frankfurt, and has some sort of experience on the way—why not?—and the moment he reaches home, he begins to bandy mythological names about: Circe, Penelope, Telemachus.

Oskar was no Ulysses, if only because on his return home he found everything unchanged. Far from being beset by lecherous suitors, his beloved Maria, who, had he been Ulysses, would have had to play the rôle of Penelope; still had her Matzerath, in whose favor she had decided long before Oskar's departure. And I do hope the more classical-minded among my readers will not, because of her somnambulism, mistake my poor Roswitha for Circe, the enchantress who turned men into beasts. Lastly, my son Kurt didn't raise a finger for his returning father; accordingly, he was no Telemachus, even if he did fail to recognize me.

If comparison there must be—and I can see that home-comers must put up with a comparison or two—I prefer to be looked upon as the Prodigal Son; for Matzerath opened the door and welcomed me like a true, not a presumptive, father. In fact, he managed to be so happy over Oskar's return, to the point of shedding real, speechless tears, that from that day on I ceased to call myself exclusively Oskar Bronski and called myself Oskar Matzerath as well.

Maria's reception of me was less emotional but not un-

friendly. She was sitting at the table, pasting up food stamps for the Board of Trade, having previously piled up a few birthday presents for little Kurt. Practical as she was, she thought first of my physical well-being, undressed me, bathed me as in times gone by, overlooked my blushes, and set me down in my pajamas at the table, Matzerath having meanwhile served up a dish of fried eggs and browned potatoes. I drank milk with my food, and as I ate and drank, the questions began: "Where have you been? We looked all over like mad; we even had to go to the police and swear we hadn't done you in. Well, here you are and thank the Lord for that. But plenty of trouble you made us and there's going to be more, because now we've got to report you back again. I only hope they won't put you in an institution. That's what you deserve. Running away without a word."

Maria was right. There was plenty of bother. A man came from the Ministry of Public Health and spoke to Matzerath in private, but Matzerath shouted so loud you could hear him all over the house; "It's out of the question. I promised my wife on her deathbed. *I'm* his father, not the Board of Health."

So I was not sent to an institution. But every two weeks an official letter came, asking Matzerath for a little signature; Matzerath refused to sign, but his forehead was creased with care.

Oskar has been getting ahead of himself; now he must smooth the creases out of Matzerath's brow, for on the night of my arrival he beamed; he was much less worried than Maria, also asked fewer questions, and was happy just to have me home. All in all, he behaved like a true father. "Won't Kurt be glad to have a little brother again!" he said as they were putting me to bed in the flat of the rather bewildered Mother Truczinski. "And just imagine, tomorrow is Kurt's third birthday."

On his birthday table my son Kurt found a cake with three candles, a crimson sweater knitted by Gretchen Scheffler, to which he paid no attention at all, and various other articles. There was a ghastly yellow ball, which he sat on, rode about on, and finally punctured with a potato knife. From the wound in the rubber he sucked the sickly sweet fluid that gathers inside all air-filled balls, and when he had enough of that began to dismantle and wreck the sailboat. The whistling top and the whip that went with it lay untouched, but frighteningly close at hand.

Oskar, who had long been thinking of this birthday, who had hastened eastward amid one of history's wildest frenzies; determined not to miss the third birthday of his son and heir—Oskar stood aside viewing the little fellow's destructive efforts, admiring his resolution, comparing his own dimensions with those of his son. I had to face the facts. While you were gone, I said to myself in some alarm, Kurt has grown by more than a head. He is already a good inch taller than the three feet you've kept yourself down to ever since your third birthday nearly seventeen years ago; it is time to make a drummer of him and call a halt to that immoderate growth.

I had stored away my drums along with my one-volume library behind the roof tiles in the attic. I picked out a gleaming, brand-new instrument, resolved—since the grown-ups weren't doing anything about it—to offer my son the same opportunity as my poor mother, faithful to her promise, had offered me on my third birthday.

In my own infancy Matzerath had chosen me as his successor in the shop. Now that I had failed him, there was every reason to suppose that he had transferred his designs to Kurt. This, I said to myself, must be prevented at all costs. But I should not like you to see in Oskar a sworn enemy of the retail trade. If my son had been offered the ownership of a factory, or even of a kingdom complete with colonies, I should have felt exactly the same. Oskar had wanted no hand-me-downs for himself and he wanted none for his son. What Oskar wanted—and here was the flaw in my logic—was to make Kurt a permanently three-year-old drummer, as though it were not just as nauseating for a young hopeful to take over a tin drum as to step into a ready-made grocery store.

This is Oskar's present opinion. But at the time he was consumed by one desire: to see a drummer son beside a drummer father, two diminutive drummers looking on at the doings of the grownup world; to establish a dynasty of drummers, capable of perpetuating itself and of handing down my work, drummed on tin encased in red and white lacquer, from generation to generation.

What a life lay ahead of us! How we might have drummed. Side by side, but also in different rooms, side by side, but also he in Labesweg and I in Luisenstrasse, he in the cellar, I in the attic, Kurt in the kitchen, Oskar in the toilet, father and son, hither and yon but occasionally together; and when

we had the chance, the two of us might have slipped under the skirts of Anna Koljaiczek, my grandmother and his great-grandmother, to live and drum and breathe in the smell of slightly rancid butter. Squatting by her portal, I should have said to Kurt: "Look inside, my son. That's where we come from. And if you're a good little boy, we shall be allowed to go back for an hour or more and visit those who are waiting."

And bending low, little Kurt would have peeped in. And ever so politely he would have asked me, his father, for explanations.

And Oskar would have whispered: "The lovely lady sitting there in the middle, playing with her lovely hands, the lovely lady whose sweet oval face brings the tears to my eyes, and yours no doubt as well, is my poor mama, your good grandmother, who died of eating eel soup, or maybe because her heart was too tender."

"Tell me more, Papa, tell me more," little Kurt would have clamored. "Who is the man with the mustache?"

With an air of mystery, I should have lowered my voice: "That's Joseph Koljaiczek, your great-grandfather. Take a good look at those flashing incendiary eyes, at his divine Polish wildness and the practical Kashubian shrewdness of his brow. Observe, if you please, the webs between his toes. In the year 1913, when the *Columbus* ran down the ways, he was hiding under a timber raft. After that he had to swim a long way; he swam and swam till he came to America and became a millionaire. But sometimes he takes to the water, swims back, and dives in here, where the fugitive firebug first found shelter and contributed his part toward my mama."

"But what about the handsome gentleman who has been hiding behind the lady who is my grandmother, who is sitting down now beside her and stroking her hands with his hands? His eyes are just as blue as yours, Papa."

Then I, unnatural son and traitor that I was, should have summoned up all my courage to answer my dear child: "Those are the dreamy blue eyes of the Bronskis that are looking at you, my boy. Your eyes, it is true, are grey. They come to you from your mother. And yet, just like this Jan who is kissing my poor mama's hands, or his father Vincent, for that matter, you too are a Bronski, a dreamer through and through, yet with a practical Kashubian side. One day we will go back there, one day we shall follow the source

Matzerath he is only a presumptive father—turn back to the events of June 12, 1944, to Kurt's third birthday.

I repeat: the child had been given a sweater, a ball, a sailboat, a whistling top, and the whip that went with it, and was going to get a drum, lacquered red and white. When he had finished dismantling his sailboat, Oskar approached, the new gift drum hidden behind his back, the battered old one dangling beneath his belly. We stood face to face, only a short step apart: Oskar, the Lilliputian; Kurt, he too a Lilliputian but an inch taller. He had a furious, vicious look on his face, for he was still busy demolishing the sailing vessel. Just as I drew forth the drum and held it up, he cracked the last remaining mast of the *Pamir*, for that was the windjammer's name.

Kurt dropped the wreck, took the drum, and turned it over; he seemed to have calmed down a bit, but his expression was still tense. It was time to hand him the drumsticks. Unfortunately, he misinterpreted my twin movements, felt threatened, and instantly knocked the sticks out of my fingers with the edge of the drum. As I bent down to pick up the sticks, he reached behind himself. I tried again to hand him the sticks, whereupon he hauled off with his birthday present and struck me. It wasn't the top that he whipped but Oskar, not the whistling top, that was meant to be whipped, but his father. Determined to teach his father to spin and to whistle, he whipped me, thinking: just wait, little brother. Thus did Cain whip Abel until Abel began to spin, staggering at first, then faster and with greater precision, until he began to sing at first in a low, disagreeable grumble, then higher and more steadily, till at last he was singing the song of the whistling top. And higher and higher Cain made me sing with his whip; I sang like a tenor singing his morning prayers, like angels forged of silver, like the Vienna Sängerknaben, like a chorus of eunuchs—I sang as Abel may have sung before he collapsed, as I too collapsed under the whip of my son Kurt.

When he saw me lying there, moaning like a run-down top, he lashed at the air as though his arm had not yet exhausted its fury. At length he examined the drum carefully while at the same time keeping a suspicious eye on me. First he chipped off the lacquer against the edge of a chair; then he threw my gift to the floor and armed himself with the massive hull of the erstwhile sailing vessel and began to beat the drum. But the sounds he produced were not drum-

ter Sector to Labesweg, Langfuhr, by a certain Captain Kanauer.

Matzerath helped as much as he could and soon Mother Truczinski felt better, though she never fully recovered. All day she sat in her chair by the window, periodically asking me or Matzerath, who would come up two or three times a day with something to eat or drink, where this "Center Sector" was, whether it was far away, and whether you could go there by train over Sunday.

With all his good intentions Matzerath could tell her nothing. Oskar, however, had learned geography from the special newscasts and Wehrmacht communiqués. I spent many a long afternoon trying with my drum to tell Mother Truczinski, who sat motionless in her chair except for her wagging head, all I could about Center Sector and its increasingly precipitate movements.

Maria had been very fond of her handsome brother. His death made her religious. All through July, she tried the religion she had been raised in; every Sunday she went to hear Pastor Hecht preach at Christ Church; once or twice Matzerath went with her, although she preferred to go alone.

Protestant services failed to satisfy Maria. One weekday—a Thursday or maybe a Friday—Maria entrusted the shop to Matzerath's care, took me, the Catholic, by the hand, and left the house. Starting off in the direction of the Neue Markt, we turned into Elsenstrasse, then took Marienstrasse, past Wohlgemuth's butcher shop, as far as Kleinhammer-Park—we're headed for Langfuhr Station, Oskar was beginning to think, we're going to take a little trip, maybe to Bissau in Kashubia. But then we turned left, waited superstitiously near the underpass for a freight train to go by, and went on through the oozing, dripping tunnel. On the far side, instead of going straight ahead toward the Film-Palast, we turned left along the embankment. Either, I figured, she is dragging me to see Dr. Hollatz in Brunshofer-Weg or else she's going to Sacred Heart to be converted.

The church door faced the railway tracks. Between the embankment and the open door we stopped still. An afternoon in late August, full of humming and buzzing. Behind us some Ukrainian women in white kerchiefs were picking and shoveling on the ballast. We stood there, peering into the cool, shady belly of the church. Far in the distance, ingeniously alluring, a violently inflamed eye: the eternal light. Behind us on the embankment the Ukrainian women stopped

their picking and shoveling. A horn blew, a train was coming, there it was, still there, not yet past, gone, the horn tooted, and the women set to work again. Maria was undecided, perhaps uncertain which foot to put forward, and put all the responsibility on me, who by birth and baptism was closer to the only-saving Church; for the first time in years, for the first time since those two weeks full of fizz powder and love, she resigned herself to Oskar's guidance.

We left the embankment and its sounds, August and its buzzing, outside. Rather mournfully, letting my fingertips under my smock play sleepily over my drum, while outwardly a look of indifference settled on my features, I recalled the Masses, pontifical offices, Vespers services and Saturday confessions I had experienced at the side of my mother, who shortly before her death was rendered pious by the intensity of her relations with Jan Bronski, who Saturday after Saturday cast off her burden by confessing, who fortified herself with sacraments on Sunday in order, thus unburdened and fortified, to meet Jan in Tischlergasse the following Thursday.

Who was the priest in those days? His name, then as now, for he was still priest of Sacred Heart, was Father Wiehnke, his sermons were pleasantly soft-spoken and unintelligible, his singing of the Credo was so thin and plaintive that even I should have been invaded by something resembling faith in those days if not for that left side-altar with the Virgin, the boy Jesus, and the boy John the Baptist.

And yet it was that altar which impelled me to pull Maria from the sunshine into the doorway and then across the flags into the nave.

Oskar took his time, sat quietly beside Maria in the oak pew, feeling more and more at his ease. Years had passed, and yet it seemed to me that the same people were still leafing through their missals, working out their strategy while waiting for Father Wiehnke's ear. We were sitting slightly to one side of the center aisle. I wanted to let Maria do the choosing, but to make the choice easier for her. On the one hand, the confessional was not so close as to upset her, thus her conversion could be leisurely, unofficial as it were; on the other hand, she was in a position to see how people behaved while preparing to confess and, while looking on, make up her mind. She had not far to go to consult Father Wiehnke in the confessional, to discuss with him the details of her conversion to the only saving faith. I felt sorry for her; she seemed so little, so awkward as she knelt amid dust, incense,

laster, tortuous angels, refracted light, contrived again, as he knelt beneath and amid the sweetness and sorrow, the sorrowful sweetness of Catholicism and for the first time crossed herself the wrong way around. Oskar gave Maria a poke and showed her the right way. She was eager to learn. He showed her where behind her forehead, where deep in her heart, exactly where in the joints of her shoulders Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have their dwelling places, and how you must fold your hands if your amen is to be successful. Maria obeyed, her hands came to rest in amen, and she began to pray.

At first Oskar, too, tried to pray for some of the dead, but while praying to the Lord for his Roswitha, while trying to negotiate peace for her and admission to heavenly joys, he so lost himself in earthly details that in the end peace and heavenly joys settled down in a Paris hotel. Accordingly, I took refuge in the Preface, because here there is nothing much to pin you down; for all eternity I said, *Sursum corda. dignum et iustum*—it is just and right. Then I let well enough alone and took to watching Maria from the side.

Catholic prayer was becoming to her. She was pretty as a picture in her devotions. Prayer lengthens the lashes, lifts the eyebrows, inflames the cheeks, makes the forehead grave, lends suppleness to the neck, and makes the nostrils quiver. Maria's features, flowering in sorrow, almost beguiled me into a display of affection. But one must not disturb those who are praying, one must neither seduce them nor let oneself be seduced by them, even if it is pleasant for those who pray and conducive to prayer, to know that someone considers them worth watching.

Oskar slipped off the smooth bench and fled from Maria. My hands, under my smock, were still quietly folded over my drum, as we, my drum and I, made our way over the flags, past the stations of the Cross in the left aisle of the nave; we did not stop with St. Anthony—~~any~~ for we had lost neither a purse nor a horse ~~bag~~ nor with St. Adalbert of Prague who was slain by the ~~barbarian~~ ~~Prussians~~. We did not halt until, hopping from flag to flag as over a checkerboard, we reached the carpeted steps at the left side-altar.

You will not doubt my word when I tell you that ~~nothing~~ had changed in the Neo-Gothic brick Church of the Sacred Heart or, *a fortiori*, on the left side-altar. The boy Jesus sat pink and naked on the Virgin's pink thigh—I said and

call her the Virgin Mary for fear of confusion with my Mary, my Maria, then busy with her conversion. Young John the Baptist, scantily clad in the same old shaggy, chocolate-colored pelt, was still pressing against the Virgin's right knee. She herself was still pointing her left forefinger at Jesus, but looking at John.

Yet even after years of absence, Oskar was less interested in the Virgin's maternal pride than in the constitutions of the two boys. Jesus was about the size of my son Kurt on his third birthday, in other words, he was about an inch taller than Oskar. John, who according to the documents was older than the Nazarene, was my size. But both of them had the same precocious expression as I, the eternal three-year-old. Nothing had changed. They had had that same sly look on their faces years before, in the days when I had frequented the Church of the Sacred Heart with my poor mama.

Climbing the carpeted steps, though without saying the Introit, I examined every fold in the drapery; slowly, carefully, I explored the painted plaster exterior of those two little nudists with my drumstick, which had more feeling than all my fingers together; omitting nothing, I covered the thighs, the bellies, the arms, taking in every crease and dimple. Jesus was the spit and image of Oskar, my healthy flesh, my strong, rather plump knees, my short but muscular drummer's arms. And the little rascal's posture was that of a drummer too. He sat on the Virgin's thigh, arms and fists raised as though he were planning to beat a drum, as though Jesus, not Oskar, were the drummer, as though he were just waiting for my drum, as though this time he seriously intended to imprint some charming rhythm on the drum for the benefit of the Virgin, John and myself. I did what I had done years before; I removed the drum from my belly and put Jesus to the test. Cautiously, careful not to harm the painted plaster, I set Oskar's red and white drum on his pink thighs. This time, however, I was driven by sheer malice, I had lost my idiotic faith in miracles, all I wanted was to show him up. For though he sat there with upraised fists, though he had my dimensions and rugged build, though he was a plaster copy of the three-year-old that I—by dint of what effort, what privations!—had remained, he could not drum, he could only give himself an air of knowing how to drum. If I had one, I could do it, he seemed to be thinking; ha-ha, I said, now you've got one, what are you going to do? Shaking with laughter, I pressed both sticks into his little

within me. "One of these days that fellow's going to ruin your voice." I cast one solitary glance upward, took the measure of one of those Neo-Gothic windows, and wrenched myself away. I did not sing, I did not follow him, I just trotted along by Maria's side to the underpass in Bahnhofstrasse. Through the oozing, dripping tunnel, up the hill to Kleinhammer-Park, right turn into Marienstrasse, past Wohlgemuth's butcher shop, left turn into Elsenstrasse, across the Striessbach to the Neuer Markt, where they were building a water tank for the air-raid defense. Labesweg was endless, but then we were home. Leaving Maria, Oskar climbed over a hundred steps to the attic. Bed sheets had been hung up to dry; behind the bed sheets a mound of air-defense sand; behind sand and buckets, behind bundles of newspaper and piles of roofing tiles, were secreted my book and my supply of drums. But there was also a shoe box containing several burned-out, but still pear-shaped light bulbs. Oskar selected one and sang it to pieces; he took another, turned it to pulverized glass, cut a third neatly in two. Upon a fourth his voice inscribed JESUS in Sütterlin script, then pulverized both bulb and inscription. He wanted to do it again, but there were no more bulbs. Exhausted, I sank down on the air-defense sand: Oskar still had his voice. Maybe Jesus had a disciple. As for me, my first disciples were to be the Dusters.

The Dusters

OSKAR WAS NOT cut out to be a follower of Christ; for one thing, he has no aptitude for enlisting disciples. Nevertheless Christ's "follow thou me" found its way indirectly, circuitously, to my heart and I became his follower though I did not believe in him. But, as they say, he who doubts, believes, and it is the unbeliever who believes longest. Jesus had treated me to a little private miracle in the Church of the Sacred Heart and I was unable to stifle that miracle under my doubts; quite on the contrary, I did all I could to make Jesus put on a repeat performance.

After that Oskar returned to Sacred Heart a number of times without Maria. It was not very difficult to slip away from Mother Truczinski, who was glued to her chair. What had Jesus to offer me? Why did I spend half the night in the left-hand aisle of the nave and let the sacristan lock me in? Why did Oskar stand at the left side-altar until his limbs congealed and his ears were frozen stiff? For with all my crushing humility and no less crushing blasphemies, I never got to hear either my drum or Jesus' voice again.

Misere. Never in all my life have I heard my teeth chatter as they did in those midnight hours in Sacred Heart. What jester could ever have found a better rattle than Oskar? I sounded like a machine-gun nest, I had a bevy of typists between my upper and lower jaws. My teeth chattered in all directions, calling forth echoes and applause. Pillars shivered, arches had gooseflesh, and when my teeth weren't chattering, I coughed. My cough hopped over the checkerboard pattern of the flags, down the transept, up the nave, hoisted itself into the choir. Multiplied by sixty, it organized a Bach society that did not sing but specialized in coughing, and just as I was beginning to think that Oskar's cough had crawled away into the organ pipes and wouldn't be heard again until the Sunday chorale, a cough rang out in the sacristy, and another from the pulpit, until at length the cough died down, coughed out its soul behind the high altar, not far from the Athlete on the Cross. It is accom-

plished, said my cough; but nothing was accomplished. The boy Jesus sat there stiff and proud, holding my drumsticks and my drum, but drum he would not, he refused to confirm my mission. For Oskar wanted to have it in writing.

A sorry habit has remained with me from that period. Whenever I visit a church or even a famous cathedral I begin to cough. Even if I am in the best of health. The moment I set foot inside, I embark on a sustained cough which takes on a Gothic, Romanesque, perhaps even a Baroque character according to the style of the church. I feel certain that years hence I shall still be able to give you a drum rendition of Oskar's cough in the Cathedral of Ulm, or of Speyer for that matter. At that time, however, in the days when I was suffering the effects of the most glacial Catholicism in mid-August, there was no opportunity to visit churches in distant lands, unless you happened to be a soldier participating in the planned withdrawals of the Reichswehr, noting perhaps in your diary: "Evacuated Orvieto today; wonderful church, must come back with Monica after the war and look at it properly."

It was easy for me to become a churchgoer, for there was nothing to keep me at home. There was Maria. But Maria had Matzerath. There was my son Kurt. But he was getting more and more insufferable, throwing sand in my eyes and clawing me so ferociously that his fingernails broke off in my parental flesh. Moreover, my son showed me a pair of fists with knuckles so white that the mere sight of them sent the blood gushing from my nose.

Strange to say, Matzerath defended me, awkwardly perhaps but not without tenderness. In his surprise, Oskar would allow this man, who had never meant a thing to him, to pick him up on his lap, hug him, gaze at him, and once even to kiss him. With tears in his eyes Matzerath had said, more to himself than to Maria: "It's impossible. I can't send my own son away. The doctors can say what they like. They don't stop to think. I bet they have no children of their own."

Maria, who was sitting at the table, pasting food stamps in ledgers as she did every evening, looked up: "Take it easy, Alfred. You talk as if I didn't care. But when they say it's the modern way to do, I don't know what to think."

Matzerath pointed at the piano, which had produced no music since the death of my poor mama: "Agnes would never have done that, she'd never have allowed it."

Maria cast a glance at the piano, shrugged her shoulders, and let them drop back into place only when she opened her mouth to speak. "Of course not, she was his mother, she kept hoping he'd get better. But you see how it is: nothing has happened, he's always being pushed around, he don't know how to live and he don't know how to die."

Was it the likeness of Beethoven, who still hung over the piano, glumly mastering the glum Hitler, who gave Matzerath the strength? "No," he shouted. "Never!" and banged his fist on the table and its damp sticky papers. He asked Maria to hand him the letter from the institution, he read it and read it again, then tore it up and scattered the scraps among the bread stamps, fat stamps, food stamps, travel stamps, heavy-labor stamps, extra-heavy-labor stamps, and the stamps for pregnant women and nursing mothers. Though, thanks to Matzerath, Oskar never fell into the hands of those doctors, he beheld a vision, and to this day, whenever he lays eyes on Maria, he beholds a vision of a beautiful clinic situated in the mountain air, of a light, airy, friendly, and modern operating room; outside its padded door, Maria, shy but smiling, hands me over confidently, to a group of first-class physicians, who are smiling too and ever so confidence-inspiring, and holding first-class, confidence-inspiring and immediately effective syringes behind their white, sterile aprons.

The whole world had forsaken me and it was only the shadow of my poor mama, falling across Matzerath's fingers and paralyzing them whenever he thought of signing the authorization form drawn up by the Ministry of Public Health, that kept me alive.

Oskar would not like to seem ungrateful. I still had my drum. I still had my voice, which is of no use to you now that you have heard all about my triumphs with glass and is probably beginning to bore the lovers of novelty among you—but to me Oskar's voice, even more than his drum, was proof of my existence and as such forever new; for as long as I sang glass to pieces, I existed.

In that period, Oskar sang a good deal. He sang with an energy born of desperation. Every time I left the Church of the Sacred Heart at a late hour, I sang something to pieces. I did not go looking for targets of particular interest. On my way home, I would select an attic window that hadn't been properly blacked out or a street lamp painted regulation blue. Each time I went to church, I chose a different way

Spurred by curiosity and flattered at so much attention, I decided to let things take their course and did the stupidest thing imaginable: I went looking for a hole in the tarred fence surrounding the chocolate factory. I found none. Slowly and nonchalantly, the young bandits converged: from the car-stop shelter, from under the trees on the avenue, and at length from the overpass. Oskar moved along the fence, still looking for that hole. They gave me just the time I needed to find the place where the plank was missing. But when I squeezed through, tearing my pants in the process, there were four of these characters in windbreakers on the other side, waiting for me with their hands in the pockets of their ski pants.

Recognizing that nothing could be done about my situation, I ran my hands over my pants, looking for the tear. It was in the seat. I measured it with outspread fingers, found it annoyingly large but put on a show of indifference, and before looking up to face the music, waited until all the boys from the car stop, the avenue, and the overpass had climbed over the fence, for they were too big to squeeze through the gap.

This was in the last days of August. From time to time the moon hid behind a cloud. I counted about twenty of these young fellows. The youngest were fourteen, the oldest sixteen, almost seventeen. The summer of '44 was hot and dry. Four of the larger boys had on Air Force Auxiliary uniforms. It was a good cherry year, I remember. They stood round Oskar in small groups, talked in an undertone, using a jargon that I made no effort to understand. They gave each other weird names, only a few of which I bothered to take note of. A little fifteen-year-old with rather misty doe's eyes was addressed, I recall, as Ripper and occasionally as Bouncer. The one beside him was Putty. The smallest, though surely not the youngest, with a protruding upper lip and a lisp, was called Firestealer. One of the Air Force Auxiliaries was addressed as Mister and another, very aptly, as Soup Chicken. There were also historical names such as Lionheart and Bluebeard—Bluebeard had the look of a milksop—and old friends of mine like Totila and Teja. Two of them even had the impudence to call themselves Belisarius and Narses. The leader was a sixteen-year-old named Störtebeker after the celebrated pirate. He had on a genuine velours hat with the crown battered in to look like a duck pond, and a raincoat that was too long for him.

ing". A nice word, but it was sure to stand for something unpleasant.

Störtebeker asserted his authority: "I'm the one that says who's going to be dusted around here and when." Then he addressed me: "We've been seeing quite a lot of you in Bahnhofstrasse. How come? Where you been?"

Two questions at once. Oskar would have to give at least one answer if he was to remain master of the situation. I turned away from the moon, faced him with my blue persuasive eyes, and said calmly: "Church."

From behind Störtebeker's raincoat came commentaries on my answer. Firestealer figured out that by church I meant Sacred Heart.

"What's your name?"

An inevitable question, a question that arises wherever man meets man and that plays a vital role in human conversation. It provides the substance of whole plays, even operas—*Lohengrin*, for instance.

I waited for the moon to pass between two clouds, let the sheen in my eyes work on Störtebeker for the time it takes to eat three spoonfuls of soup. Then I spoke, intent on the effect, named myself—what would I have got but a laugh if I had owned to the name of Oskar? "My name is Jesus," I said. A long silence ensued. Finally Firestealer cleared his throat: "We'll have to dust him after all, chief."

This time Firestealer met with no opposition; with a snap of his fingers, Störtebeker gave his permission, and Firestealer seized me, dug his knuckles into my arm just above the elbow, and gouged, producing a hot, painful sensation, until Störtebeker snapped his fingers again as a sign to stop—so that was dusting!

"Well now, what is your name?" The chief in the velours hat gave himself an air of boredom, did a little shadow boxing, which made the long sleeves of his raincoat slide up to his elbows, and held up his wristwatch in the moonlight. "You've got one minute to think it over," he whispered. "Then I give the boys the green light."

Oskar had a whole minute in which to study the moon with impunity, to look for a solution among the craters, to reconsider his idea of stepping into Christ's shoes. This green light talk was not to my liking, and I certainly was not going to let any half-baked hoodlums put me on a schedule. I waited about thirty-five seconds; then Oskar said: "I am Jesus."

Schichau shipyards and the railroad car factory. The two groups worked separately, joining forces only for night expeditions to the Steffens-Park and Hindenburg-Allee, where they would waylay leaders of the League of German Girls on their way home after training sessions. Friction between the groups was avoided; their territories were marked out with precision, and Störtebeker looked upon the leader of the Neufahrwasser group more as a friend than a rival. The Dusters were against everything. They raided the offices of the Hitler Youth, attacked soldiers found necking in the parks to strip them of their medals and insignia of rank, and with the help of their members among the Air Force Auxiliaries stole arms, ammunition, and gasoline from the AA batteries. But their main project, which they had been maturing ever since their inception, was an all-out attack on the Rationing Office.

At the time Oskar knew nothing about the Dusters, their organization or plans, but he was feeling low and forsaken, and he thought these young men might give him a sense of security, a sense of belonging somewhere. Despite the difference in our ages—I would soon be twenty—I already considered myself secretly as one of them. Why, I said to myself, shouldn't you give them a sample of your art? The young are always eager to learn. You yourself were fifteen or sixteen once. Set them an example, show them your accomplishments. They will look up to you. Maybe they will choose you as their leader. Now at last you will be able to exert influence, to bring your intelligence and experience to bear; this is your chance to heed your vocation, to gather disciples and walk in the footsteps of Christ.

Perhaps Störtebeker suspected that there was thought behind my thoughtfulness. He gave me time to think, and I was grateful to him for that. A moonlit night toward the end of August. Slightly cloudy. Air-raid alarm. Two or three searchlights on the coast. Maybe a reconnaissance plane. Paris was just being evacuated. Facing me the front, rich in windows, of the Baltic Chocolate Factory. After a long retreat, Army Group Center had dug in on the Vistula. Baltic was no longer working for the retail market, its whole output went to the Air Force. Oskar was having to get used to the idea of General Patton's soldiers strolling beneath the Eiffel Tower in American uniforms. In response to this painful thought—ah, the happy hours with Roswitha!—Oskar lifted a drumstick. Störtebeker noticed my gesture,

Oskar weighed the wristwatch in his hand, a cute little thing with a luminous dial and hands indicating twenty-three minutes after midnight, and handed it to Firestealer. Firestealer cast a questioning look at his boss. Störtebeker nodded his consent. Shifting his drum to a comfortable position for the homeward march, Oskar said: "Jesus will lead you. Follow Him."

The Christmas Play

THERE WAS A good deal of talk in those days about secret weapons and final victory. We, the Dusters, discussed neither one, but we had the secret weapon.

Oskar's first move after taking over the leadership of the thirty to forty members of the gang was to have Störtebeker introduce me to the leader of the Neufahrwasser outfit. Moorkähne, a sixteen-year-old with a limp, was the son of an official at the Neufahrwasser pilot office; his physical defect—his right leg was almost an inch shorter than his left—had prevented him from being drafted or taken on as an Air Force Auxiliary. Though a bit ostentatious about his limp, Moorkähne was shy and soft-spoken. There was always an artful smile on his lips, and he was regarded as the best student in the graduating class at the Conradinum. He had every prospect, if the Russian Army should raise no objection, of passing his final examination brilliantly; he was planning to study philosophy.

Like Störtebeker, whose unstinting respect I had won, Moorkähne recognized me as Jesus, first in command of the Dusters. Oskar insisted at once on being shown the storehouse and treasury, for both groups kept their loot in the same place, the spacious cellar of a quiet, fashionable villa on Jeschkenthaler-Weg in Langfuhr. This house, covered with ivy and creepers and separated from the street by a gently sloping meadow, was the abode of Putty's parents, whose name was Von Puttkamer. Mr. von Puttkamer, a nobleman of Pomeranian, Polish, and Prussian descent and a wearer of the Knight's Cross, was off commanding a division in fair France; Mrs. Elisabeth von Puttkamer had been spending the last few months in the Bavarian highlands for reasons of health. Wolfgang von Puttkamer, whom the Dusters called Putty, had been left in charge of the house; as for the elderly, half-deaf maid who ministered to the young gentleman's needs, she never went below the ground floor, and we never saw her, for we entered the cellar through the laundry room.



and sought out the museum in Fleischergasse; my men had orders to look for Niobe, the wooden figurehead.

They did not find her. In the adjoining room Mother Truczinski sat motionless but for the wagging of her head. In a way we had something in common; for while Oskar engaged in long-distance song, she was occupied with long-distance thoughts. She searched God's heaven for her son Herbert and the front lines of Center Sector for her son Fritz. She also had to look far away for her eldest daughter Guste, who early in 1944 had married and gone off to distant Düsseldorf, for it was there that Headwaiter Köster had his home; though he personally was spending most of his time in Courland. A scant two weeks' furlough was all the time Guste had to keep him for herself and get to know him.

Those were peaceful evenings. Oskar sat at Mother Truczinski's feet, improvised a bit on his drum, took a baked apple from the recess in the tile stove, and with this wrinkled fruit meant for old women and little children vanished into the dark bedroom. He would raise the black-out paper and open the window just a crack, letting in a little of the frosty night. Then he would take aim and dispatch his long-distance song. He did not sing at the stars, the Milky Way was not on his route. His song was directed at Winterfeld-Platz, not at the Radio Building but at the boxlike structure across the way, which housed the district headquarters of the Hitler Youth.

In clear weather my work took hardly a minute. Meanwhile my baked apple had cooled a little by the open window. Munching, I returned to Mother Truczinski and my drum, and soon went to bed with every assurance that while Oskar slept the Dusters, in Jesus' name, were looting Party treasuries, stealing food cards, rubber stamps, printed forms, or a membership list of the Hitler Youth Patrol.

Indulgent I allowed Störtebeker and Moorkähne to engage in all sorts of monkey business with forged documents. The gang's main enemy was the Patrol Service. It was all right with me if they chose to kidnap their adversaries, dust them, and—as Firestealer, who had charge of this activity, called it—polish their balls.

Since I remained aloof from these expeditions, which were a mere prologue that can give you no idea of my real plans, I cannot say for sure whether it was the Dusters

who in September, 1944, tied up two high officers of the Patrol Service, including the dreaded Helmut Neitberg, and drowned them in the Mottlau, above the Cows' Bridge.

However, I, Oskar-Jesus, who gave the Dusters their orders, feel the need to deny certain stories that gained currency later on: that the Dusters had connections with the Edelweiss Pirates of Cologne or that Polish partisans from Tuchlerheide had exerted an influence on us or even directed our movement. All this is pure legend.

At our trial we were also accused of having ties with the July 20th conspirators, because Putty's father, August von Puttkamer, had been close to Field Marshal Rommel and had committed suicide. Since the beginning of the war, Putty had seen his father no more than five or six times, and then scarcely long enough to get used to his changing insignia of rank. It was not until our trial that he first heard about this officer's foolishness, which, to tell the truth, was a matter of utter indifference to us. When he did hear about it, he cried so shamefully, so shamelessly that Fire-stealer, who was sitting beside him, had to dust him right in front of the judges.

Only once in the course of our activity did any grown-ups approach us. Some shipyard workers—with Communist affiliations, as I could tell at a glance—tried to gain influence over us through our apprentices at the Schichau dockyards and turn us into a Red underground movement. The apprentices were not unwilling. But the schoolboys among us rejected all political trends. Mister, an Air Force Auxiliary who was the cynic and theoretician of the gang, stated his views at one of our meetings: "We have nothing to do with parties," he declared. "Our fight is against our parents and all other grownups, regardless of what they may be for or against."

He put it rather too strongly, no doubt, but all the schoolboys agreed; the outcome was a factional split. The shipyard apprentices started a club of their own—I was sorry to lose them, they were good workers. Despite the objections of Störtebeker and Moorkähne, they continued to call themselves Dusters. At the trial—their outfit was caught at the same time as ours—the burning of the training sub in the shipyard basin was pinned on them. Over a hundred U-boat captains and ensigns had met a terrible death in the fire which broke out below decks; the U-boat crews were blocked in their quarters, and when the ensigns, lads of

intimidated the Hitler Youth Patrols that they scarcely left their quarters except occasionally to check the papers of flighty young ladies at the railroad stations, we shifted our field of operations to the churches and began, as the Communist mechanic had put it, to occupy ourselves with Christmas plays.

Our first concern was to find replacements for the invaluable Schichau apprentices. At the end of October, Störtebeker swore in the brothers Felix and Paul Rennwand, both choirboys at Sacred Heart. Störtebeker had approached them through their sister Lucy, a girl of sixteen who, over my protest, was allowed to attend the swearing-in ceremony. Setting their left hands on my drum, which the boys, incurable Romantics that they were, liked to think of as some sort of symbol, the Rennwand brothers repeated the oath of allegiance, a text so absurd and full of hocus-pocus that I can no longer remember it.

Oskar watched Lucy during the ceremony. In one hand she held a sandwich that seemed to quiver slightly, she shrugged her shoulders and gnawed at her lower lip. Her triangular fox face was expressionless, and she kept her eyes riveted on Störtebeker's back. Suddenly I had misgivings about the Dusters' future.

We began to redecorate our basement. In close collaboration with the choirboys, I oversaw the acquisition of the required furnishings. From St. Catherine's we took a sixteenth-century half-length Joseph who turned out to be authentic, a few candelabra, some chalices, patens, and cruets, and a Corpus Christi banner. A night visit to the Church of the Trinity brought us a wooden, trumpet-blowing angel of no artistic interest, and a colored tapestry, copied from an older original, showing a lady who seemed ever so prim, prissy, and deceitful, and a mythical animal known as a unicorn, who was obviously very much under her influence. The lady's smile, as Störtebeker observed, had the same playful cruelty as that which predominated in Lucy's fox face, and I hoped my lieutenant would not prove as submissive as the unicorn. We hung the tapestry on the rear wall of our cellar, formerly decorated with death's heads, black hands, and other such absurdities, and soon the unicorn motif seemed to dominate all our deliberations. Meanwhile Lucy had made herself at home in our midst, coming and going as she pleased and sniggering behind my back. Why then, I asked myself, did we have to bring in

squeaking we were able to topple the boy Baptist over and wrap him in a woolen blanket. Then for a moment we breathed in the midnight ecclesiastical silence.

It took a little longer to saw off the child Jesus, whose whole rear end rested on the Virgin's thigh. Bouncer, the elder Rennwand, and Lionheart were at work for fully forty minutes. But where, I wondered, was Moorkähne? His idea had been that our movements would attract less attention if he and his men came directly from Neufahrwasser and met us in the church. Störtebeker seemed nervous and irritable. Several times he asked the Rennwand brothers about Moorkähne. When at length, as we all expected, Lucy's name came up, Störtebeker stopped asking questions, wrenched the metal saw out of Lionheart's unpracticed hands, and working feverishly gave the boy Jesus the *coup de grâce*.

As they laid Jesus down, his halo broke off. Störtebeker apologized to me. Controlling myself with some difficulty—for I too was succumbing to the general irritability—I told them to pick up the pieces, which were gathered into two caps. Firestealer thought the halo could be glued together again. Jesus was bedded in cushions and wrapped in blankets.

Our plan was to saw off the Virgin at the waist, making a second cut between the cloud and the soles of her feet. We would leave the cloud where it was and take only the figures, Jesus, the two halves of the Virgin, and the boy Baptist if there was still room in one of the carts. The figures, as we were glad to discover, weighed less than we had expected. The whole group was hollow cast. The walls were no more than an inch thick, and the only heavy part was the iron skeleton.

The boys were exhausted, especially Firestealer and Lionheart. Operations had to be suspended while they rested, for the others, including the Rennwand brothers, could not saw. The gang sat shivering in the pews. Störtebeker stood crumpling his velours hat, which he had removed on entering the church. The atmosphere was not to my liking. Something had to be done. The boys were suffering the effects of the religious architecture, full of night and emptiness. Some were worried about Moorkähne's absence. The Rennwand brothers seemed to be afraid of Störtebeker; they stood to one side, whispering until Störtebeker ordered them to be still.

Slowly, I seem to remember, slowly and with a sigh, I

at our trial was consistently referred to as a Mass, though a black one to be sure.

The three of them began with the Gradual prayers; the boys in the pews and on the flags genuflected, crossed themselves, and Mister, who knew the words up to a point, embarked on the Mass with the expert support of the two choirboys. I began to drum, cautiously in the Introit, but more forcefully in the Kyrie. *Gloria in excelsis Deo*—I praised the Lord on my drum, summoned the congregation to prayer, substituted a drum solo of some length for the Epistle. My Halleluia was particularly successful. In the Credo, I saw that the boys believed in me; for the Offertory, I drummed rather more softly as Mister presented the bread and mixed wine with water. Sharing a whiff of incense with the chalice, I looked on to see how Mister would handle the Lavabo. *Orate, fratres*, I drummed in the red glow of the flashlights, and led up to the Transubstantiation: This is My body. *Oremus*, sang Mister, in response to orders from above—the boys in the pews offered me two different versions of the Lord's Prayer, but Mister managed to reconcile Protestants and Catholics in one Communion. Even before the meal was over, my drum introduced the Confiteor. The Virgin pointed her finger at Oskar, the drummer. I had indeed taken the place of Christ. The Mass was going like clockwork. Mister's voice rose and fell. How splendidly he pronounced the Benediction: pardon, absolution, and remission. *"Ite, missa est—Go, you are dismissed."* By the time these words were spoken, every one of us, I believe, had experienced a spiritual liberation. When the secular arm fell, it was upon a band of Dusters confirmed in the faith in Oskar's and Jesus' name.

I had heard the motors during the Mass and Störtebeker too had turned his head. We alone showed no surprise when voices were heard and heavy heels converged on us from the front and side doors and from the sacristy.

Störtebeker wanted to lift me down from the Virgin's thigh. I motioned him away. He understood, nodded, and made the boys keep kneeling. There they remained, waiting for the police. They trembled, a few lost their balance, some dropped on two knees, but they waited in silence until the law, converging in three groups, had surrounded the left side-altar.

The police had flashlights too, but favored a white beam. Störtebeker arose, crossed himself, stepped forward into the

formed a counterweight to the lady with the unicorn in our cellar headquarters.

Oskar, however, was carried away to a trial that I still call the second trial of Jesus, a trial that ended with the acquittal of Oskar, hence also of Jesus.

now they are shouting so everybody can hear: Dive! Go ahead and dive! Go ahead.

This, you will admit, though a diving tower may be a step nearer heaven, is a desperate plight to be in. In January, 1945, the Dusters and I, though it was not the bathing season, found ourselves in a similar situation. We had ventured high up, we were all crowded together on the diving tower, and below, forming a solemn horseshoe round a waterless pool, sat the judges, witnesses, and court clerks.

Störtebeker stepped out on the supple, railingless springboard.

"Dive!" cried the judges.

But Störtebeker didn't feel like it.

Then from the witnesses' bench there arose a slender figure with a grey pleated skirt and a little Bavarian-style jacket. A pale but not indistinct face which, I still maintain, formed a triangle, rose up like a target indicator: Lucy Rennwand did not shout. She only whispered: "Jump, Störtebeker, jump!"

Then Störtebeker jumped. Lucy sat down again on the witnesses' bench and pulled down the sleeves of her Bavarian jacket over her fists.

Moorkähne limped onto the springboard. The judges ordered him to dive. But Moorkähne didn't feel like it; smiling in embarrassment at his fingernails, he waited for Lucy to pull up her sleeves, let her fists fall out of the wool, and display the black-framed triangle with the slits for eyes. Then he plunged furiously at the triangle, but missed it.

Even on the way up, Firestealer and Putty hadn't been exactly lovey-dovey; on the springboard they came to blows. Putty was dusted, and even when he plunged, Firestealer wouldn't let him go.

Bouncer, who had long silky eyelashes, closed his deep, sad doe's eyes before taking the leap.

The Air Force Auxiliaries had to take off their uniforms before plunging.

Nor were the Rennwand brothers permitted to take their heavenward plunge attired as choirboys; that would have been quite unacceptable to their sister Lucy, sitting on the witnesses' bench in her jacket of threadbare wartime wool and encouraging young men to dive.

In defiance of history, Belisarius and Narses dove first, then Totila and Teja. Bluebeard plunged, Lionheart plunged,

ing people, and changing diapers were being practiced all over the world, though not always with the same skill. My head swimming at the thought of so much purposive movement, I turned back to the trial which was continuing in my honor at the foot of the diving tower. "Jump, sweet Jesus, jump," whispered Lucy Rennwand, the witness and virgin temptress. She was sitting on Satan's lap, and that brought out her virginity. He handed her a sandwich. She bit into it with pleasure, but lost none of her chastity. "Jump, sweet Jesus," she chewed, offering me her triangle, still intact.

I did not jump, and you will never catch me jumping or diving from a diving tower. This was not to be Oskar's last trial. Many attempts have been made, one very recently, to persuade me to jump. At the ring-finger trial—which I prefer to call the third trial of Jesus—there were again plenty of spectators at the edge of the waterless swimming pool. They sat on witnesses' benches, determined to enjoy and survive my trial.

But I made an about-face, stifled the fledgling swallows in my armpits, squashed the hedgehogs mating under the soles of my feet, starved the grey kittens out from under my kneecaps. Scorning the exaltation of plunging, I went stiffly to the railing, swung myself onto the ladder, descended, let every rung in the ladder reinforce my conviction that diving towers can not only be climbed but also relinquished without diving.

Down below, Maria and Matzerath were waiting for me. Father Wiehnke gave me his blessing though I hadn't asked for it. Gretchen Scheffler had brought me a little winter coat and some cake. Kurt had grown and refused to recognize me either as a father or as a half brother. My grandmother Koljaiczek held her brother Vincent by the arm. He knew the world and talked incoherent nonsense.

As we were leaving the courthouse, an official in civilian clothes approached Matzerath, handed him a paper, and said: "You really ought to think it over, Mr. Matzerath. You've got to get the child off the streets. You see how helpless and gullible he is, always ready to be taken in by disreputable elements."

Maria wept and gave me my drum, which Father Wiehnke had taken care of during the trial. We went to the streetcar stop by the Central Station. Matzerath carried me the last bit of the way. I looked back over his shoulder, searching the crowd for a triangular face, wondering whether she too had

between floor and ceiling toward the middle of the war, the storeroom was as safe as a regulation air-raid shelter. On several occasions Matzerath had thought of removing the uprights, for there had been no heavy air raids. But when Greff the air-raid warden was no longer there to remonstrate with him, Maria insisted that he leave the props in place. She demanded safety for little Kurt, and occasionally even for me.

During the first air raids at the end of January, old man Heilandt and Matzerath joined forces to remove Mother Truczinski and her chair to our cellar. Then, perhaps at her request, possibly to avoid the effort of carrying her, they left her in her flat, sitting beside the window. After the big raid on the inner city, Maria and Matzerath found the old woman with her jaw hanging down, squinting as though a sticky little gnat had got caught in her eye.

The door to the bedroom was lifted off its hinges. Old man Heilandt brought his tools and a few boards, mostly disassembled crates. Smoking Derby cigarettes that Matzerath had given him, he took measurements. Oskar helped him with his work. The others vanished into the cellar, for the artillery shelling had started in again.

Old man Heilandt was in a hurry, he had in mind a simple rectangular box. But Oskar insisted on the traditional coffin shape. I held the boards in place, making him saw to my specifications, and the outcome was a coffin tapered at the foot end, such as every human corpse has a right to demand.

It was a fine-looking coffin in the end. Lina Greff washed Mother Truczinski, took a fresh nightgown from the cupboard, cut her fingernails, arranged her bun and propped it up on three knitting needles. In short, she managed to make Mother Truczinski look, even in death, like a grey mouse who had been given to potato pancakes and Postum in her lifetime.

The mouse had stiffened in her chair during the bombing and her knees refused to unbend. Before he could put on the coffin lid, old man Heilandt was obliged, when Maria left the room for a few moments, to break her legs.

Unfortunately there was no black paint, only yellow. Mother Truczinski was carried out of the flat and down the stairs in boards unpainted, but properly tapered at the foot end. Oskar followed with his drum, reading the inscription on the coffin lid: Vitello Margarine—Vitello Margarine—



cough properly. He began to dance and thrash about with his arms and swept a can of Leipzig stew off the shelf. My Kalmuck, who until then had been quietly looking on, deposited me carefully on the floor, reached behind him, brought something or other into a horizontal position, and shot from the hip. He had emptied a whole magazine before Matzerath finished suffocating.

What strange things one does at the moments when fate puts on its act! While my presumptive father was swallowing the Party and dying, I, involuntarily and unaware of what I was doing, squashed between my fingers a louse I had just caught on the Kalmuck. Matzerath had fallen across the ant highway. The Ivans left the cellar by way of the stairs leading to the shop, taking with them a few packages of artificial honey. My Kalmuck went last, but he took no honey, for he had to change the magazine of his tommy gun. The widow Greff lay disheveled and undone between the margarine crates. Maria clutched little Kurt to her as though to crush him. A phrase from Goethe passed through my mind. The ants found themselves facing a new situation but, undismayed by the detour, soon built a new highway round the doubled-up Matzerath; for the sugar that trickled out of the burst sack had lost none of its sweetness while Marshal Rokossovski was occupying the city of Danzig.

Should I or Shouldn't I?

FIRST CAME THE Rugii, then the Goths and Gepidae, then the Kashubes from whom Oskar is descended in a straight line. A little later the Poles sent in Adalbert of Prague, who came with the Cross and was slain with an ax by the Kashubes or Borussians. This happened in a fishing village called Gyddanyzc. Gyddanyzc became Danczik, which was turned into Dantzic, later written without the t, and today the city is called Gdansk.

But before this orthographic development and after the arrival of the Kashubes, the dukes of Pomerelia came to Gyddanyzc. They bore such names as Subislaus, Sambor, Mestwin, and Swantopolk. The village became a small town. Then came the wild Borussians, intent on pillage and destruction. Then came the distant Brandenburgers, equally given to pillage and destruction. Boleslaw of Poland did his bit in the same spirit and no sooner was the damage repaired than the Teutonic Knights stepped in to carry on the time-honored tradition.

The centuries passed. The city was destroyed and rebuilt in turn by the dukes of Pomerelia, the grand masters of the Teutonic Order, the kings and antikings of Poland, the counts of Brandenburg, and the bishops of Wloclawek. The directors of the building and wrecking enterprises were named Otto and Waldemar, Bogussa, Heinrich von Plotzke—and Dietrich von Altenberg, who built the fortress of the Teutonic Knights on the spot which became the Hevelius-Platz, where in the twentieth century the Polish Post Office was defended.

The Hussites came, made a little fire here and there, and left. The Teutonic Knights were thrown out of the city and the fortress was torn down because the townspeople were sick of having a fortress in their city. The Poles took over, and no one was any the worse for it. The king who brought this to pass was Kazimierz, who became known as the Great, son of Wladyslaw the First. Then came Louis of Hungary and after Louis his daughter Jadwiga. She married Jagiello

of Lithuania, founder of the Jagellon dynasty. After Wladyslaw II came Wladyslaw III, then another Kazimierz, who lacked the proper enthusiasm and nevertheless, for thirteen long years, squandered the good money of the Danzig merchants making war on the Teutonic Knights. The attentions of John Albert, on the other hand, were more taken up by the Turks. Alexander was followed by Zygmunt Stary, or Sigismund the Elder. After the chapter about Sigismund Augustus comes the one about Stefan Batory, for whom the Poles like to name their ocean liners. He besieged the city and shot cannon balls into it for Lord knows how long (as we may read in our books), but never succeeded in taking it. Then came the Swedes and continued in the same vein. They got so fond of besieging the city that they repeated the performance several times. In the same period, the Gulf of Danzig also became exceedingly popular with the Dutch, Danes, and English, and a number of these foreign sea captains came to be heroes of the sea just by cruising around the Danzig roadstead.

The Peace of Oliva. How sweet and peaceful it sounds! There the great powers noticed for the first time that the land of the Poles lends itself admirably to partition. Swedes, Swedes, and more Swedes—Swedish earthworks, Swedish punch, Swedish gallows. Then came the Russians and Saxons, because Stanislaw Leszczynski, the poor King of Poland, was hidden in the city. On account of this one king, eighteen hundred houses were destroyed, and when poor Leszczynski fled to France because that's where his son-in-law Louis was living, the people of Danzig had to cough up a round million.

Then Poland was divided in three. The Prussians came uninvited and painted the Polish eagle over with their own bird on all the city gates. Johannes Falk, the educator, had just time to write his famous Christmas carol "O Du fröhliche . . ." when the French turned up. Napoleon's general was called Rapp and after a miserable siege the people of Danzig had to rap out twenty million francs to him. The horrors of the French occupation should not necessarily be held in doubt. But it lasted only seven years. Then came the Russians and the Prussians and set the Speicherinsel on fire with their artillery. That was the end of the Free State that Napoleon had dreamed up. Again the Prussians found occasion to paint their bird on all the city gates. Having done so with Prussian thoroughness, they proceeded to establish a garrison consisting of the 4th Regiment of Gren-

rawer, and with the utmost enthusiasm, the provisions in the cellar. He engaged Maria as salesgirl and introduced her very verbosely to his imaginary Luba, whereupon Maria showed Mr. Fajngold our Matzerath, who had been lying in the cellar for three days under a square of canvas. We had been unable to bury him because the streets were swarming with Russians avid for bicycles, sewing machines, and women.

When Mr. Fajngold saw the corpse, which we had turned over on his back, he clapped his hands over his head in the same expressive gesture as Oskar had seen Sigismund Markus, his toy dealer, make years before. He called not only Luba his wife, but his whole family into the cellar, and there is no doubt that he saw them all coming, for he called them by name: Luba, Lev, Jakub, Berek, Leon, Mendel, and Sonya. He explained to them all who it was who was lying there dead and went on to tell us that all those he had just summoned as well as his sister-in-law and her other brother-in-law who had five children had lain in the same way, before being taken to the crematoria of Treblinka, and the whole lot of them had been lying there—except for him because he had had to strew lime on them.

Then he helped us to carry Matzerath upstairs to the shop. His family was about him again, and he asked his wife Luba to help Maria wash the corpse. She didn't stir a finger, but Mr. Fajngold didn't notice, for by now he was moving supplies from the cellar up to the shop. This time Lina Greff, who had washed Mother Truczinski, wasn't there to help us; she had a houseful of Russians and we could hear her singing.

Old man Heilandt had found work as a shoemaker. He was busy resoling the boots the Russians had worn out during their rapid advance and was unwilling at first to make us a coffin. But after Mr. Fajngold had drawn him into a business deal—Derby cigarettes from our shop for an electric motor from his shed—he set his boots aside and took up other tools and the last of his boards.

At that time—until we were evicted and Mr. Fajngold turned the cellar over to us—we were living in Mother Truczinski's flat, which had been stripped bare by neighbors and Polish immigrants. Old man Heilandt removed the door between the kitchen and living room from its hinges, for the door between the living room and bedroom had been used for Mother Truczinski's coffin. Down below, in the

laria lifted the cage out of Kurt's reach and handed it up to me on the cart. Oskar, who was in no mood for lovebirds, put the cage down on Matzerath's enlarged margarine crate. I was sitting in the rear end of the cart, dangling my legs and looking into the folds of Mr. Fajngold's face, which bore a look of thoughtful gloom, suggesting a mind at work on a complicated problem that refused to come out.

I beat my drum a little, something sprightly, in an effort to dispel Mr. Fajngold's somber thoughts. But his expression remained unchanged, his eyes were somewhere else, maybe in far-away Galicia; one thing they did not see was my drum. Oskar gave up, and after that there was no sound but Maria's weeping and the rumbling of the wheels.

What a mild winter, I thought when we had left the last houses of Langfuhr behind us; I also took some notice of the lovebird, which was puffing out its feathers in consideration of the afternoon sun hovering over the airfield.

The airfield was guarded, the road to Brösen closed. An officer spoke with Mr. Fajngold, who during the interview held his top hat between his fingers, letting his thin, reddish-blond hair blow in the wind. After tapping for a moment on Matzerath's crate as though to determine its contents and tickling the lovebird with his forefinger, the officer let us pass, but assigned two young fellows, who couldn't have been more than sixteen, with caps that were too little and tommy guns that were too big, to escort us, perhaps for our protection or perhaps to keep an eye on us.

Old man Heilandt pulled, without ever once turning around. He had a trick of lighting his cigarette with one hand, without slowing down. Planes darted about overhead. The engines were so clearly audible because of the season, late February or early March. Only in the vicinity of the sun were there a few clouds which gradually took on color. The bombers were heading for Hela or returning from Hela Peninsula, where what was left of the Second Army was still holding out.

The weather and the droning of the planes made me sad. There is nothing so tedious, nothing that makes for such a feeling of surfeit and disgust, as a cloudless March sky full of airplane motors crescendo and decrescendo. To make matters worse, the two Russian puppies kept trying, quite unsuccessfully, to march in step.

Perhaps some of the boards of the hastily assembled coffin had been jolted loose, first on the cobblestones, then on bat-

tered asphalt; we were heading into the wind and, as we have seen, I was sitting in back; in any case, it smelled of dead Matzerath, and Oskar was glad when we reached Saspe Cemetery.

We couldn't take the cart as far as the iron gate, for the road was blocked shortly before the cemetery by the charred wreckage of a T-34. Other tanks, obliged to detour around it on their way to Neufahrwasser, had left their tracks in the sand to the left of the highway and flattened a part of the cemetery wall. Mr. Fajngold asked old man Heilandt to take the rear. They carried the coffin, which sagged slightly in the middle, along the tracks of the tank treads, traversed with some difficulty the stone pile into which the cemetery wall had been transformed, and finally, with their last strength, took a few steps among the tumble-down tombstones. Old man Heilandt tugged avidly at his cigarette and blew out smoke over the coffin. I carried the cage with the lovebird. Maria dragged two shovels behind her. Little Kurt carried or rather brandished a pickax, attacking the grey granite tombstones at the risk of his life, until Maria took it away from him and helped the men to dig.

How fortunate that the soil here is sandy and not frozen, I said to myself, while looking for Jan Bronski's place behind the northern wall. It must be here, I thought, or maybe there. I couldn't be sure, for the changing seasons had turned the telltale fresh whitewash a crumbling grey like all the walls in Saspe.

I came back through the hind gate, looked up at the stunted pines: So now they're burying Matzerath, I thought, for fear of thinking something irrelevant. And I found at least partial meaning in the circumstance that the two skat brothers, Bronski and Matzerath, should lie here in the same sandy ground, even if my poor mama was not here to keep them company.

Funerals always make you think of other funerals.

The sandy soil put up a fight, it probably wanted more experienced gravediggers. Maria paused, leaned panting on her pick, and began to cry again when she saw Kurt throwing stones at the lovebird in its cage. Kurt missed, his stones overshot the mark; Maria wept loudly and in all sincerity, because she had lost Matzerath, because she had seen something in Matzerath which in my opinion wasn't there, but which, as far as she was concerned, was to remain henceforth real and lovable. Mr. Fajngold said a few comforting

ords, which gave him a chance to rest, for the digging was so much for him. Old man Heilandt wielded his shovel with the regularity of a seeker after gold, tossed the earth behind him, and blew out puffs of smoke, also at measured intervals. The two Russian puppies sat on the cemetery wall a few steps away from us, chatting into the wind. Overhead, airplanes and a sun growing steadily ripper.

They may have dug about three feet. Oskar stood idle and perplexed amid the old granite, amid the stunted pines, between Matzerath's widow and a Kurt throwing stones at a dovebird.

Should I or shouldn't I? You are going on twenty-one, Oskar. Should you or shouldn't you? You are an orphan. Actually you should, it's high time. When your poor mama died, you were left half an orphan. That was when you would have made up your mind. Then they laid Jan, your presumptive father, under the crust of the earth. That made you a presumptive full orphan. You stood here on this sand named Saspe, holding a slightly oxidized cartridge case. It was raining and a Ju-52 was getting ready to land. Wasn't his "Should I or shouldn't I?" audible even then, if not in the sound of the rain, then in the roaring of the landing transport plane? You said to yourself: it's the rain, it's the sound of airplanes engines; uninspired interpretations of this sort can be read into any text you please. You wanted everything to be perfectly plain and not just presumptive.

Should I or shouldn't I? Now they are digging a hole for Matzerath, your second presumptive father. As far as you know, you have no more presumptive fathers. Why, then, do you keep juggling with two bottle-green bottles: should I or shouldn't I? Who else is there to question? These stunted pines, themselves so questionable?

I found a slender cast-iron cross with crumbling ornaments and encrusted letters adding up to Mathilde Kunkel—or Runkel. In the sand—should I or shouldn't I?—between thistles and wild oats—should I?—I found—or shouldn't I?—three or four rusty metal wreaths the size of dinner plates—should I?—which once upon a time—or shouldn't I?—were no doubt supposed to look like oak leaves or laurel—or should I after all?—weighed them in my hand, took aim—should I?—the top end of the ironwork cross—or shouldn't I?—had a diameter of—should I?—maybe an inch and a half—or shouldn't I?—I ordered myself to stand six feet away—should I?—tossed—or shouldn't I?—and missed

And so it was not true that the pin had been open when I picked up the badge from the concrete floor. The pin had been opened within my closed hand. It was a jagged, pointed lozenge that I had passed on to Matzerath, intending that they find the insignia on him, that he put the Party in his mouth and choke on it—on the Party, on me, his son; for this situation couldn't go on forever.

Old man Heilandt began to shovel. Little Kurt helped him clumsily but with alacrity. I had never loved Matzerath. Occasionally I liked him. He took care of me, but more as a cook than as a father. He was a good cook. If today I sometimes miss Matzerath, it is his Königsberg dumplings, his pork kidneys in vinegar sauce, his carp with horseradish and cream, his green eel soup, his Kassler Rippchen with sauerkraut, and all his unforgettable Sunday roasts, which I can still feel on my tongue and between my teeth. They forgot to put a cooking spoon in the coffin of this man who transformed feelings into soups. They also forgot to put a deck of skat cards in his coffin. He was a better cook than skat player. Still, he played better than Jan Bronski and almost as well as my poor mama. Such was his endowment, such was his tragedy. I have never been able to forgive him for taking Maria away from me, although he treated her well, never beat her, and usually gave in when she picked a fight. He hadn't turned me over to the Ministry of Public Health, and had signed the letter only after the mails had stopped running. When I came into the world under the light bulbs, he chose the shop as my career. To avoid standing behind a counter, Oskar had spent more than seventeen years standing behind a hundred or so toy drums, lacquered red and white. Now Matzerath lay flat and could stand no more. Smoking Matzerath's Derby cigarettes, old man Heilandt shoveled him in. Oskar should have taken over the shop. Meanwhile Mr. Fajngold had taken over the shop with his large, invisible family. But I inherited the rest: Maria, Kurt, and the responsibility for them both.

Maria was still crying authentically and praying Catholically. Mr. Fajngold was sojourning in Galicia or solving some knotty reckoning. Kurt was weakening but still moving. The Russian puppies sat chatting on the cemetery wall. With morose regularity old man Heilandt shoveled the head of Saspe over the margarinecrate coffin. Oskar could now read three letters of the word Vitello. At this point he unslung the drum from his neck, no longer saying "Shovel!"

whereupon he proclaimed my growth to the world with loud cries and birdlike fluttering.

So much for my addendum, which is actually superfluous; for I had started to grow even before I was hit by the stone and flung myself into Matzerath's grave. But from the very first Maria and Mr. Fajngold saw but one reason for my growth, or sickness as they called it, namely, the stone that had hit me in the head, my leap into the grave. Even before we had left the cemetery, Maria gave Kurt a sound spanking. I was sorry for Kurt. For after all he may have thrown that stone at me to help me, to accelerate my growth. Perhaps he wanted at last to have a real grown-up father, or maybe just a substitute for Matzerath; for to tell the truth, he has never acknowledged or honored the father in me.

In the course of my growth, which went on for nearly a year, there were plenty of doctors of both sexes who confirmed the theory that the stone and my headlong leap into the grave were responsible, who said and wrote in my case history: Oskar Matzerath is a deformed Oskar because a stone hit him in the back of the head, etc. etc.

Here it seems relevant to recall my third birthday. What had the grownups said about the beginning of my biography proper? This is what they had said: At the age of three, Oskar Matzerath fell from the cellar stairs to the concrete floor. This fall put an end to his growth, etc. etc.

In these explanations we find man's understandable desire to find physical justification for all alleged miracles. Oskar must admit that he too examines all alleged miracles with the utmost care before discarding them as irresponsible hokum.

On our return from Saspe Cemetery, we found new tenants in Mother Truczinski's flat. They were nice enough people and offered to take us in until we had found something else, but Mr. Fajngold refused to countenance such overcrowding and said we could have the bedroom of the ground-floor flat, he could manage for the present with the living room. To this arrangement Maria objected, feeling that it would not be right in her recently widowed state to live at such close quarters with a gentleman alone. At the time Fajngold was unaware of being a gentleman alone, but Luba's energetic presence made it easier in a way for him to appreciate Maria's arguments. For Luba's sake as well, they would make a different arrangement, he would turn the cellar over to us. He even helped us to rearrange the storeroom, but

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he would not let me move into the cellar, for I was sick, a poor sick child, and so a bed was set up for me in the living room, beside my poor mama's piano.

It was hard to find a doctor. Most of the doctors had left with the troops, because in January the medical insurance fund had been evacuated westward and patients had become exceedingly rare. After a long search, Mr. Fajngold managed to scare up a lady doctor from Elbing, who was amputating at the Helene Lange School, where wounded from the Wehrmacht and the Red Army lay side by side. She promised to look in, and four days later she actually did. She sat down by my sickbed, smoked three or four cigarettes in a row while examining me, and on the last cigarette fell asleep.

Mr. Fajngold was afraid to wake her up. Maria gave her a timid poke. But the lady doctor didn't wake up until her cigarette burned down and singed her finger. She stood up and stamped out the butt on the carpet. She spoke tersely in a tone of nervous irritation: "You'll have to excuse me. Haven't closed an eye in three weeks. I was in Käsemark with a trainload of children from East Prussia. Couldn't get the kids on the ferry. Only took troops. Four thousand kids. All blown to pieces." There was the same terseness in the way she stroked my cheek. Thrusting a fresh cigarette into her face, she rolled up her left sleeve and took an ampoule out of her briefcase. While giving herself a shot in the arm, she said to Maria: "I can't tell you what's the matter with the boy. Ought to be in a hospital, but not here. You've got to get away. To the West. The joints of his wrists, knees, and shoulders are swollen. It's bound to attack his brain in the end. Make him cold compresses. I'm leaving you a few pills in case the pain prevents him from sleeping."

I liked this terse lady doctor, who didn't know what was wrong with me and admitted as much. In the few weeks that followed, Maria and Mr. Fajngold made me several hundred cold compresses which soothed me, but didn't prevent my knee, wrist, and shoulder joints, and my head as well, from swelling and aching. What horrified Maria and Mr. Fajngold the most was my swelling head. She gave me the pills, but they were soon gone. He began to plot fever curves, took to experimenting with pencil and ruler, constructed bold fantastic shapes round my temperature, which he took five times a day with a thermometer obtained on the black market in exchange for synthetic honey. My fever

chart looked like a mountain range with terrifying chasms—I thought of the Alps, the snowy peaks of the Andes. In reality, there was nothing so fantastic about my temperature: in the morning I usually had a hundred and five-tenths; by evening it had risen to something over a hundred and two and the most I ever had during my period of growth was a hundred and two point seven. I saw and heard all sorts of things in my fever; I was riding a merry-go-round, I wanted to get off but I couldn't. I was one of many little children sitting in fire engines and hollowed-out swans, on dogs, cats, pigs, and stags, riding round and round. I wanted to get off but I wasn't allowed to. All the little children were crying, like me they wanted to get out of the fire engines and hollowed-out swans, down from the backs of the cats, dogs, pigs, and stags, they didn't want to ride on the merry-go-round any more, but they weren't allowed to get off. The Heavenly Father was standing beside the merry-go-round and every time it stopped, he paid for another turn. And we prayed: "Oh, our Father who art in heaven, we know you have lots of loose change, we know you like to treat us to rides on the merry-go-round, we know you like to prove to us that this world is round. Please put your pocketbook away, say stop, finished, *fertig, basta, stoi*, closing time—we poor little children are dizzy, they've brought us, four thousand of us, to Käsemark on the Vistula, but we can't get across, because your merry-go-round, your merry-go-round . . ."

But God our Father, the merry-go-round owner, smiled in his most benevolent manner and another coin came sailing out of his purse to make the merry-go-round keep on turning, carrying four thousand children with Oskar in their midst, in fire engines and hollowed-out swans, on cats, dogs, pigs, and stags, round and round in a ring, and every time my stag—I'm still quite sure it was a stag—carried us past our Father in heaven, the merry-go-round owner, he had a different face: He was Rasputin, laughing and biting the coin for the next ride with his faith healer's teeth; and then he was Goethe, the poet prince, holding a beautifully embroidered purse, and the coins he took out of it were all stamped with his father-in-heaven profile; and then again Rasputin, tipsy, and again Herr von Goethe, sober. A bit of madness with Rasputin and a bit of rationality with Goethe. The extremists with Rasputin, the forces of order with Goethe. The tumultuous masses round Rasputin, calendar mottoes with

Goethe . . . until at length the merry-go-round slowed down—not because my fever subsided, but because a soothing presence bent down over my fever, because Mr. Fajngold bent over me and stopped the merry-go-round. He stopped the fire engines, the swan, and the stag, devaluated Rasputin's coins, sent Goethe back to the Mothers, sent four thousand dizzy little children floating off to Käsemark, across the Vistula, to the kingdom of heaven—and picked Oskar up from his sickbed, and lifted him up on a cloud of Lysol, that is to say, he disinfected me.

It started on account of the lice and then became a habit. He first discovered the lice on little Kurt, then on me, Maria, and himself. The lice had probably been left behind by the Kalmuck who had taken Matzerath from Maria. How Mr. Fajngold yelled when he discovered them. He summoned his wife and children; the whole lot of them, he suspected, were infested with vermin. Then, having bartered rolled oats and synthetic honey for different kinds of disinfectant, he took to disinfecting himself, his whole family, Maria, and myself every single day. He rubbed us, sprayed us, and powdered us. And while he sprayed, powdered, and rubbed, my fever blazed, his tongue wagged, and I learned about the whole carloads of carbolic acid, lime, and Lysol that he had sprayed, strewn, and sprinkled when he was disinfecting in Treblinka Concentration Camp. Every day at 2 p.m., in his official capacity as Disinfector Marusz Fajngold he had sprinkled Lysol on the camp streets, over the barracks, the shower rooms, the cremating furnaces, the mounds of clothing, over those who were waiting to shower, and those who lay recumbent after their showers, over all who came out of the ovens and all who were about to go in. He listed the names, for he knew them all. So he told me about Bilauer, who one hot day in August had let the disinfecting to sprinkle the camp streets with carloads of Lysol. Mr. Fajngold had taken his service revolver and Bilauer had the match. Old Zev Kurland of the GIC had administered the oath to the lot of them. And Engineer Kurland had broken into the weapons room. Bilauer had shot the Hauptsturmführer Kutner. Szymbach and Kurland had strangled Zisenis by the throat; the others tackled the guard post at Trawniki Camp. Some were electrocuted during the high-tension fence. SS Sergeant Schöpke, who had been a little jokes while taking his protégé to the camp, stood by the camp gate shooting. But a day later the

tell me about a laboratory assistant—not a nurse, for once—who was accused of giving herself an abortion, perhaps abetted by one of the interns. It is beyond me why my patient wastes his time and brains on such trivialities.

Mr. Matzerath has just asked me to describe him. It will be a pleasure. Now I shall be able to omit several dozen of his sententious and interminable stories about nurses.

My patient is four feet one inch tall. He carries his head, which would be too large even for a person of normal proportions, between his shoulders on an almost nonexistent neck. His eyes are blue, brilliant, alive with intelligence; occasionally they take on a dreamy, ecstatic, wide-eyed look. He has dense, slightly wavy, dark-brown hair. He likes to exhibit his arms, which are powerful in comparison with the rest of the body, and his hands, which, as he himself says, are beautiful. Especially when Mr. Matzerath plays the drum—which the management allows for three or at most four hours a day—his fingers move as though of their own accord and seem to belong to another, better proportioned body. Mr. Matzerath has made a fortune on phonograph records and they are still bringing in money. Interesting people come to see him on visiting days. Even before his trial, before he was brought here to us, his name was familiar to me, for Mr. Oskar Matzerath is a well-known performer. I personally believe him to be innocent and am not sure whether he will stay here with us or be let out and resume his successful career. Now he wants me to measure him, though I did so only two days ago.

Without bothering to read over what Bruno my keeper has written, I, Oskar, take up my pen again.

Bruno has just measured me with his folding rule. He has left the rule lying alongside me, and hurried out of the room, loudly proclaiming the result. He even dropped the not creation he was secretly working on while I was telling him my story. I presume that he has gone to get Dr. (Miss) Hornstetter.

But before she comes in and confirms Bruno's measurements, Oskar will tell you what it is all about: In the three days during which I told my keeper the story of my growth, I grew a whole inch.

And so, as of today, Oskar measures four feet two. He will now relate how he fared after the war when in relatively good health, despite my deformity, writing with diffi-

culty, but fluent at talking and reading, I was discharged from the Düsseldorf City Hospital in the hope that I might embark—as people discharged from hospitals are always expected to do—on a new and adult life.

book three

Firestones and Tombsstones

FAT, SLEEPY, GOOD-NATURED. There had been no need for Guste Truczinski to change in becoming Guste Köster, especially as her association with Köster had been so very limited: they had been engaged for two weeks when he was shipped out to the Arctic Front; when he came home on furlough, they had married and spent a few nights together, most of them in air-raid shelters. Though there was no news of Köster's whereabouts after the army in Courland surrendered, Guste, when asked about her husband, would reply with assurance, at the same time gesturing toward the kitchen: "Oh, he's a prisoner in Russia. There's going to be some changes around here when he gets back."

The changes she had in mind involved Maria and more particularly little Kurt. Discharged from the hospital, I said goodbye to the nurses, promising to come and see them as soon as I had the chance. Then I took the streetcar to Bilk, where the two sisters and my son Kurt were living. The apartment house stopped at the fourth floor; the rest, including the roof, had been destroyed by fire. Entering the third-floor flat, I found Maria and my son busily engaged in black market operations. Kurt, who was six years old, counted on his fingers. Even in the black market Maria remained loyal to her Matzerath. She dealt in synthetic honey. She spooned the stuff from unlabeled pails and weighed out quarter-pounds on the kitchen scales. I had barely time to get my bearings in the cramped flat before she put me to work doing up packages.

Kurt was sitting behind his counter—a soap box. He looked in the direction of his homecoming father, but his

chilly grey eyes seemed to be concerned with something of interest that could be seen through me. Before him on his counter lay a sheet of paper on which he was adding up imaginary columns of figures. After just six weeks of schooling in overcrowded, poorly heated classrooms, he had the look of a very busy self-made man.

Guste Köster was drinking coffee, real coffee, as Oskar noticed when she presented me with a cupful. While I busied myself with the honey, she observed my hump with curiosity and a look suggesting commiseration with her sister Maria. It was all she could do to sit still and not caress my hump, for like all women she was convinced that it's good luck to touch, pat, or stroke a hump. To Guste good luck meant the return of Köster, who would change everything. She restrained herself, patted her coffee cup instead, and heaved a sigh, followed by the litany that I was to hear several times a day for several months: "When Köster gets home there's going to be changes around here before you can say Jakob Schmidt. You can bet your bottom taler on that."

Guste frowned on black market activities but was not averse to drinking the real coffee obtained for synthetic honey. When customers came, she left the living room and padded away into the kitchen, where she raised an ostentatious clatter in protest.

There was no shortage of customers. At nine o'clock, right after breakfast, the bell began to ring: short, long, short. At 10 p.m. Guste disconnected the bell, often amid protests from Kurt, whose schooling made distressing inroads on his business day.

"Synthetic honey?" said the visitor.

Maria nodded gently and asked: "A quarter or a half a pound?" But there were other customers who didn't want honey. They would say: "Flints?" Whereupon Kurt, who had school alternately in the morning and afternoon, would emerge from his columns of figures, grope about under his sweater for a little cloth bag, and project his challenging childlike voice into the living room air: "Would you like three or four? My advice is to take five. They'll be up to twenty-four before you know it. Last week they were eighteen, and this morning I had to ask twenty. If you came two hours ago, right after school, I could have let you take them for twenty-one."

In a territory six blocks long and four blocks wide Kurt was the only dealer in flints. He had a "source" at the

told anybody who or what it was, though he never stopped talking about it. Even before going to sleep at night, he would say, instead of his prayers: "I've got a source."

As his father, I claimed that I was entitled to know my son's source. He didn't even trouble to inject a note of mystery into his voice when he said "I've got a source." If his tone conveyed anything at all, it was pride and self-assurance. "Where did you get those flints?" I roared at him. "You will tell me this minute."

Maria's standing remark in that period, whenever I tried to get at the source, was: "Leave the kid alone. In the first place, it's none of your business; in the second place, if anybody's going to ask questions, it's me; in the third place, don't take on like you was his father. A few months ago, you couldn't even say boo."

When I went on too long about Kurt's source, Maria would smack her hand down on the honey pail and, indignant to the elbow, launch into a diatribe against me and also Guste, who sometimes supported Oskar in his effort to penetrate the source: "A fine lot you are. Trying to ruin the kid's business. Biting the hand that feeds you. When I think of the ten calories Oskar gets for sick relief that he gobbles up in two days, it makes me good and sick, in fact, it makes me laugh."

Oskar can't deny it: I had a monstrous appetite in those days: it was thanks to Kurt and his source, which brought in more than the honey, that Oskar was able to regain his strength after the meager hospital fare.

Oskar was reduced to shamefaced silence; taking the ample pocket money with which little Kurt deigned to provide him, he would leave the flat in Bilk and stay away as much as he could, to avoid having his nose rubbed in his shame.

Today there are plenty of well-heeled critics of the economic miracle who proclaim nostalgically—and the less they remember about the situation in those days the more nostalgic they become—"Ah, those were the days, before the currency reform! Then people were still alive! Their empty stomachs didn't prevent them from waiting in line for theater tickets. And the wonderful parties we used to improvise with two pretzels and a bottle of potato schnaps, so much more fun than the fancy doings today, with all their caviar and champagne."

This is what you might call the romanticism of lost op-

portunities. I could lament with the best of them if I chose, for in the days when Kurt's "source" was gushing, I developed a sudden interest in adult education and imbibed a certain amount of culture almost free of charge. I took courses at night school, became a steady visitor at the British Center, also known as "Die Brücke", discussed collective guilt with Catholics and Protestants alike, and shared the guilt feelings of all those who said to themselves: "Let's do our stint now; when things begin to look up we'll have it over with and our consciences will be all right."

Be that as it way, it is to night school that I owe what education I possess; I am the first to own that it doesn't amount to much, though there is something rather grandiose about the gaps in it. I began to read avidly, no longer satisfied, now that I had grown, with an oversimplified world evenly divided between Goethe and Rasputin or with the information that could be culled from the 1904-1916 issues of Köhler's *Naval Calendar*. I was always reading, though I don't remember what. I read in the toilet. I read while waiting in line for theater tickets, surrounded by young girls with Mozart pigtails, also reading. I read while Kurt sold his flints and while I myself was packaging synthetic honey. And when the current was shut off, I read by the light of tallow candles also obtained from Kurt's "source".

I am ashamed to say that what I read in those days did not become a part of me, but went in one eye and out the other. I have retained a few turns of phrase, an aphorism or two, and that is about all. And the theater? A few names of actors: Hoppe, Peter Esser, Flickenschildt and her special way of pronouncing the letter r. I recall some drama students in experimental theaters, who tried to improve on Flickenschildt's r's; I remember Gründgens as Tasso, he wore the regulation black, but had discarded the laurel wreath called for in Goethe's text, alleging that the greenery burned his hair. And Gründgens again, still in black, as Hamlet. And la Flickenschildt claiming that Hamlet is fat. Yorick's skull made quite an impression on me because of the impressive remarks it drew from Gründgens. *Draussen vor der Tür* played in unheated theaters to spellbound audiences; to me Beckmann as the man with the broken glasses was Köster, Guste's husband, who would change everything on his return home and stop up my son Kurt's source forever.

Now all that is behind me; today I know that a postwar binge is only a binge and therefore followed by a hangover,

and one symptom of this hangover is that the deeds and misdeeds which only yesterday were fresh and alive and real, are reduced to history and explained as such. Today I am able once more to appreciate the instruction Gretchen Scheffler meted out to me amid her travel souvenirs and her knitting: not too much Rasputin, Goethe in moderation, Keyser's *History of the City of Danzig*, the armament of a battleship that has long been lying on the bottom of the sea, the speed (in knots) of all the Japanese torpedo boats that took part in the battle of Tsushima, not to mention Belisarius and Narses, Totila and Teja, as represented in Felix Dahn's *A Struggle for Rome*.

In the spring of '47 I abandoned night school, the British Center, and Pastor Niemöller, and took my leave, from the second balcony, of Gustaf Gründgens, who still figured on the program as Hamlet.

Two years had not passed since at Matzerath's grave I had resolved to grow, and already I had lost interest in grownup life. I dreamed of my lost three-year-old dimensions. I wanted to be three feet tall again, smaller than my friend Bebra, smaller than the dear departed Roswitha. Oskar missed his drum. I took long walks which often ended up at the City Hospital. In any event I was expected to call once a month on Professor Irdell, who regarded Oskar as an interesting case. At regular intervals Oskar visited the nurses he had known during his illness, and even when they had no time for him, their hurrying white uniforms, betokening recovery or death, gave him a feeling bordering on happiness.

The nurses liked me, they played childish, but not malicious, games with my hump, gave me good things to eat, and told me interminable, pleasantly soporific stories about the complexities of hospital life. I listened, gave advice, and was able even to arbitrate some of their little disputes, for I enjoyed the sympathy of the head nurse. On these days Oskar was the only man among twenty or more young or not so young girls camouflaged beneath nurses' uniforms—and in some strange way he was an object of desire.

As Bruno has already said, Oskar has lovely, expressive hands, fine wavy hair, and those winning, ever so blue, Bronski eyes. Possibly the attractiveness of my hands, eyes, and hair was accentuated by my hump and the shocking proximity of my chin to my narrow, vaulted chest. It was not infrequent, in any case, that as I was sitting in the

nurses' room, they would take hold of my hands, play with my fingers, fondle my hair, and say to one another in leaving: "When you look into his eyes, you forget all the rest."

Thus I was superior to my hump and I might well have attempted a conquest in the hospital if I had still had my drum, if I had been able to count on my reliable drummer's potency of former years. As it was, I felt unsure of myself and my physical reactions and I would leave the hospital after these affectionate hors d'oeuvres, fearing to reach out for the main course. I would take the air, go for a walk in the garden or around the wire fence which, with its close-meshed regularity, gave me a peace of mind that I expressed by whistling. I would watch the streetcars headed for Wersten and Benrath or stroll along the park promenade beside the bicycle path, smiling in pleasant boredom at the efforts of nature, which was playing spring and, following the program to a T, making buds burst open almost audibly.

Across the way, our Sunday painter who art in heaven, was each day adding a little more green fresh from the tube to the trees of Wersten Cemetery. Cemeteries have always had a lure for me. They are well kept, free from ambiguity, logical, virile, and alive. In cemeteries you can summon up courage and arrive at decisions, in cemeteries life takes on distinct contours—I am not referring to the borders of the graves—and if you will, a meaning.

Along the northern wall of the cemetery ran a street called Bittweg, occupied by no less than six manufacturers of tombstones. There were two large establishments: C. Schnoog and Julius Wöbel. The rest were small artisans: R. Haydenreich, J. Bois, Kühn & Müller, and P. Korneff. Sheds and workshops with large signs hanging from the roofs, some freshly painted, others barely legible, indicating the name of the firm and the nature of its wares: Tombstones—Mortuary Monuments and Borders—Natural and Artificial Stone—Mortuary Art. Korneff's sign, in such disrepair that I had to spell it out, said: P. Korneff, Stonecutter and Mortuary Sculptor.

Between the workshop and the wire fence enclosing the yard stood neat rows of monuments on simple and double pedestals; they were of different sizes, calculated to adorn anything from a solitary one-man grave to a family vault with room for four. Just behind the fence, reflecting its diamond-shaped pattern in sunny weather, an assortment of tombstones: shell-lime cushions for modest pocketbooks,

polished diorite slabs with unpolished palms, standard thirty-inch children's tombstones of slightly cloudy Silesian marble, surrounded by fluting and adorned toward the top with sunken reliefs, most of which represented broken roses. Next came a row of plain, red sandstone slabs taken from the façades of bombed-out banks and department stores. At the center the prize piece was displayed: a monument of bluish-white Tyrolian marble with three pedestals, two side-pieces, and a large richly carved slab featuring what is known in the trade as a corpus. This corpus was beardless; his distinguishing features were: head and knees turned leftward, a crown of thorns, three nails, open hands, and stylized bleeding from the wound in his flank, five drops, I seem to recall.

This was far from being the only mortuary monument in Bittweg showing a corpus turned leftward—sometimes there were as many as ten of them getting ready for the spring season. But Korneff's Jesus Christ had made a particular impression on me, because, well, because he showed a marked resemblance to my Athlete on the Cross, flexing his muscles and expanding his chest over the main altar of the Church of the Sacred Heart. I spent hours by that fence, scraping a stick along the close wire meshes, thinking of everything and nothing and toying perhaps with a wish or two. For a long while Korneff remained in hiding. A stove-pipe full of knees and elbows emerged from one of the windows of the shop and jutted over the flat roof. You couldn't get very good coal in those days. Yellow smoke arose in fitful puffs and fell back on the roofing paper. More smoke seeped from the windows, slid down the drainpipe, and lost itself amid tombstones in various stages of completion. Outside the sliding door of the workshop stood a three-wheeled truck under several tarpaulins, as though camouflaged against attack from low-flying planes. Sounds from the shop—wood striking iron, iron chipping stone—bore witness to the stonecutter at work.

In May the canvas was gone from over the three-wheeler, the sliding door stood open. I could see inside the workshop grey on grey, stones on the cutting bench, a polishing machine that looked like a gallows, shelves full of plaster models, and at last Korneff. He walked with a stoop and permanently bent knees, his head thrust rigidly forward. The back of his neck was crisscrossed with grimy, once pink adhesive tape. He stepped out of the shop with a rake and,

assuming no doubt that spring had come, began to clean up the grounds. He raked carefully between the tombstones, leaving tracks in the gravel, occasionally stopping to remove dead leaves from one of the monuments. As he was raking between the shell-lime cushions and diorite slabs near the fence, I was suddenly surprised by his voice: "What's the matter, boy; don't they want you at home no more?"

"I'm very fond of your tombstones," I said. "Mustn't say that out loud," he replied. "Bad luck. Talk like that and they'll be putting one on top of you."

Only then did he move his stiff neck, catching me, or rather my hump, in a sidelong glance: "Say, what they done to you? Don't it get in your way for sleeping?"

I let him have his laugh. Then I explained that a hump was not necessarily a drawback, that it didn't get me down, that, believe it or not, some women and even young girls had a special weakness for humps and were only too glad to adapt themselves to the special proportions and possibilities of a hunchback.

Leaning his chin on his rake handle, Korneff pondered: "Maybe so. I've heard tell of it."

He went on to tell me about his days in the basalt quarries when he had had a woman with a wooden leg that could be unbuckled. This, to his way of thinking, was something like my hump, even if my gas meter, as he insisted on calling it, was not removable. The stonecutter's memory was long, broad, and thorough. I waited patiently for him to finish, for his woman to buckle her leg on again. Then I asked if I could visit his shop.

Korneff opened the gate in the fence and pointed his rake in invitation at the open sliding door. Gravel crunched beneath my feet and a moment later I was engulfed in the smell of sulphur, lime, and dampness.

Heavy, pear-shaped wooden mallets with fibrous hollows showing frequent repetition of the same expert blow, rested on roughly hewn slabs of stone. Stippling irons for the embossing mallet, stippling tools with round heads, freshly re-forged and still blue from tempering; long, springy etching-chisels and bull chisels for marble, polishing paste drying on four-cornered sawing trestles, and, on wooden rollers, ready to move, an up-ended, polished travertine slab, fatty, yellow, cheesy, porous for a double grave.

"That's a bush hammer, that's a spoon chisel, that's a groove cutter, and that," Korneff lifted a board a hand's

breadth wide and three feet long and examined the edge closely, "that's a straight edge; I use it to whack the apprentices with if they don't keep moving."

My question was not one of pure politeness: "You employ apprentices then?"

Korneff told me his troubles: "I could keep five boys busy. But you can't get none. All the young pantywaists wants to learn nowadays is how to turn a crooked penny on the black market." Like me, the stonecutter was opposed to the dark machinations that prevented so many a young hopeful from learning a useful trade. While Korneff was showing me carborundum stones ranging from coarse to fine and their effect on a Solnhof slab, I was playing with a little idea. Pumice stones, chocolate-brown sandstone for rough polishing, tripoli for high polish, and there was my little idea popping up again, but it had taken on a higher, shinier polish. Korneff showed me models of lettering, spoke of raised and sunken inscriptions, and told me about gilding; that it wasn't nearly so expensive as generally supposed, that you could gild a horse and rider with one genuine old taler. This made me think of the equestrian monument of Kaiser Wilhelm on the Heumarkt in Danzig, which the Polish authorities would maybe decide to gild, but neither horse nor rider could make me give up my little idea, which seemed to become shinier and shinier. I continued to toy with it, and went so far as to formulate it while Korneff was explaining the workings of a three-legged stippling machine for sculpture and tapping his knuckles on some plaster models of Christ crucified: "So you're thinking of taking on an apprentice?" This was my first formulation. My little idea gained ground. What I actually said was: "I gather you're looking for an apprentice, or am I mistaken?" Korneff rubbed the adhesive tape covering the boils on his neck. "I mean, would you consider taking me on as an apprentice, other things being equal?" I had put it awkwardly and corrected myself at once: "Don't underestimate my strength, my dear Mr. Korneff. It's just my legs that are underdeveloped. There's plenty of strength in my arms." Delighted with my resolution and determined to go the whole hog, I bared my left arm and asked Korneff to feel my muscle, which was small but tough. When he made no move to feel it, I picked up an embossing chisel that was lying on some shell lime and made the metal bob up and down on my biceps. I continued my demonstration until Korneff turned on the polish-

ing machine; a carborundum disk raced screeching over the travertine pedestal of a slab for a double grave. After a while Korneff, his eyes glued to the machine, shouted above the noise: "Sleep on it, boy. It's hard work. Come back and see me when you've thought it over. I'll take you on if you still feel like it."

Following Korneff's instructions, I slept a whole week on my little idea; I weighed and compared: on the one hand Kurt's firestones, on the other, Korneff's tombstones. Maria was always finding fault: "You're a drain on our budget, Oskar. Why don't you start something? Tea or cocoa maybe, or powdered milk." I started nothing; instead, I basked in the approval of Guste, who held up the absent Köster as the example to follow and praised me for my negative attitude toward the black market. What really troubled me was my son Kurt, who sat there writing columns of imaginary figures and overlooking me just as I had managed for years to overlook Matzerath.

We were having our lunch. Guste had disconnected the bell so our customers wouldn't find us eating scrambled eggs with bacon. Maria said: "You see, Oskar, we have nice things to eat. Why? Because we don't sit with our hands folded." Kurt heaved a sigh. Flints had dropped to eighteen. Guste ate heartily and in silence. I too. I savored the eggs, but even while savoring, I felt miserable, perhaps because powdered eggs are not really so very appetizing, and suddenly, while biting into some gristle, experienced a yearning for happiness so intense that it made my cheeks tingle. Against all my better judgment, despite my ingrained skepticism, I wanted happiness. I wanted to be boundlessly happy. While the others were still eating, content with scrambled egg-powder, I left the table and went to the cupboard, as though it contained happiness. Rummaging through my compartment, I found, not happiness, but behind the photograph album, two packages of Mr. Fajngold's disinfectant. From one package I took—no, not happiness, but the thoroughly disinfected ruby necklace which had belonged to my mother, which Jan Bronski years ago, on a winter's night that smelled of more snow to come, had removed from a shopwindow with a circular hole cut out a short while before by Oskar, who in those days was still happy and able to cut glass with his voice. And with that necklace I left the flat. The necklace, I felt, would be my start, my jumping-off place. I took the car to the Central

Station, thinking if all goes well . . . and throughout the lengthy negotiations, the same thoughts were with me. But the one-armed man and the Saxon, whom the other called the Assessor, were aware only of my article's material value, they failed to suspect what pathways of happiness they laid out before me when in return for my poor mama's necklace they gave me a real leather briefcase and twelve cartons of "Ami" cigarettes, Lucky Strikes.

That afternoon I was back in Bilk. I unloaded twelve cartons of Lucky Strikes, a fortune. I savored their amazement, thrust the mountain of blond tobacco at them, and said: this is for you. From now on I want you to leave me alone. It's not too much to ask for all these cigarettes. Aside from that I want a lunchbox with lunch in it, beginning tomorrow. I hope you will be happy with your honey and flints, I said without anger or resentment; as for me, I shall practice another art, my happiness will be written, or to put it more professionally, incised on tombstones.

Korneff took me on as his helper for a hundred reichsmarks a month. Not much money, but I worked hard for it just the same. It was clear by the end of the first week that I was not strong enough for the heavy work. I had been given the job of embossing a slab of Belgian granite, fresh from the quarry, for a family vault. In an hour's time I could scarcely hold the chisel and my mallet hand was numb. I also had to leave the blunt chiseling for Korneff, but thanks to my skill, I was able to take over the fine chiseling and scalloping, to square off the slabs, draw the lines for the four blows, and finish the dolomite borders. Sitting on an improvised stool, in my right hand the chisel and in my left, despite the objections of Korneff, who wished to make me right-handed, a pear-shaped wooden mallet or an iron bush hammer; metal rang on stone, the sixty-four teeth of the bush hammer bit simultaneously into the stone to soften it. Here was happiness; not my drum, to be sure, just an ersatz, but there is also such a thing as ersatz happiness, perhaps happiness exists only as an ersatz, perhaps all happiness is an ersatz for happiness. Here I was, then, in a storehouse of ersatz happiness: Marble happiness, sandstone happiness. Hard happiness: Carrara. Cloudy, brittle happiness: alabaster. The happiness of chrome steel cutting into diorite. Dolomite: green happiness; gentle happiness: tufa. Colored happiness from the river Lahn. Porous happiness: basalt. Cold happiness from the Eifel. Like a volcano the

happiness erupted and fell in a layer of dust, of grit between my teeth. I proved most talented at cutting inscriptions. I soon outdid Korneff and he entrusted me with all the ornamental work, the acanthus leaves, the broken roses for those who died in their tender years, such Christian symbols as XP or INRI, the flutes and beads, the eggs and anchors, chamfers and double chamfers. Oskar provided tombstones at all prices with all manner of ornaments. And when I had spent eight hours clouding a polished diorite slab with my breath and incising an inscription such as: Here rests in God my beloved husband—new line—Our beloved father, brother, and uncle—new line—Joseph Esser—new line—b. April 3, 1885, d. June 22, 1946—new line—Death is the Gateway to Life—I was conscious, as I reread the text, of an ersatz happiness, that is, I was pleasantly happy. In gratitude to Joseph Esser, who had passed away at the age of sixty-one, and to the little green clouds of diorite raised by my chisel, I took special care with the O's in Esser's epitaph; Oskar was particularly fond of the letter O, and there was always a fine regularity and endlessness about my O's, though they tended to be rather too large.

At the end of May I went to work as a stonecutter's helper; at the beginning of October Korneff developed two new boils, and it was time to set up the travertine slab for Hermann Webknecht and Else Webknecht, née Freytag, in the South Cemetery. Until then Korneff, doubting my strength, had refused to take me with him to the cemetery. When he had a tombstone to haul and set up, he usually borrowed one of Julius Wöbel's helpers, who was almost stone-deaf but otherwise a satisfactory worker. In return Korneff would give Wöbel—who employed eight men—a hand in emergencies. Time and time again I had offered my services for work at the cemetery; cemeteries had retained their attraction for me, though at the time there were no decisions to be made. Fortunately, the beginning of October was the rush season at Wöbel's, he would need all his men until the frosts set in; Korneff had to fall back on me.

We put the travertine slab on hardwood rollers and rolled it up the ramp onto the back of the three-wheel truck. We set the pedestal beside it, cushioned the edges in empty paper sacks, loaded on tools, cement, sand, gravel, and the rollers and crates for unloading; I shut the tail gate. Korneff got in and started the motor. Then he stuck his head and

granite, obelisks, truncated columns—symbolic or real war damage—a tarnished green angel behind a yew tree or something that looked like a yew tree. A woman shading her eyes with a marble hand, dazzled by her own marble. Christ in stone sandals blessing the elm trees, and in Section Four another Christ, blessing a birch. Delicious daydreams on the path between Section Four and Section Five: the ocean, for instance. And this ocean casts, among other things, a corpse up on the beach. From the direction of the Zoppot beach promenade, violin music and the bashful beginnings of a fireworks display for the benefit of the war blind. Oskar, aged three, bends down over the flotsam, hoping it will prove to be Maria, or perhaps Sister Gertrude, whom I should ask out some time. But it is fair Lucy, pale Lucy, as I can see by the light of the fireworks, now hurrying toward their climax. Even if I couldn't see her face, I'd recognize her by the knitted Bavarian jacket she always has on when she is planning evil. When I take it off her, the wool is wet. Wet too is the jacket she has on under the jacket. Another little Bavarian jacket. And at the very end, as the fireworks die down and only the violins are left, I find, under wool on wool on wool, her heart wrapped in an athletic jersey marked League of German Girls, her heart, Lucy's heart, a little cold tombstone, on which is written: Here lies Oskar—Here lies Oskar—Here lies Oskar . . .

"Wake up, boy," Korneff interrupted my daydreams. washed ashore by the sea, illumined by the fireworks. We turned left and Section Eight, a new section without trees and with but few tombstones, lay flat and hungry before us. The graves were all alike, too fresh to be decorated, but the last five burials were easily recognizable: moldering mounds of brown wreaths with faded, rain-soaked ribbons.

We quickly found Number 79 at the beginning of the fourth row, adjoining Section Seven, which already had a more settled look with its sprinkling of young, quick-growing trees and its considerable number of tombstones, mostly of Silesian marble, arranged with a certain regularity. We approached 79 from the rear, unloaded the soil, cement, gravel, and the travertine slab with its slight, low mound. The three-wheeler gave a jump as we rolled the slab down on the crates waiting to receive it. Korneff removed the temporary cross, bearing the names of H. Weibnecht and E. Webknecht, from the head end of the grave. I handed him the drill and he began to dig the two holes—first the

feet three inches, stipulated the cemetery regulations—for the concrete posts, while I brought water from Section Seven and mixed concrete. I had finished just as he, having dug five feet, said he had finished. I began to fill the holes with concrete while Korneff sat catching his breath on the travertine slab, reaching behind him and feeling his boils. "Coming to a head," he said. "I can always feel it when they're ready to bust." My mind just about vacant, I rammed in the concrete. Coming from Section Seven, a Protestant funeral crawled through Section Eight to Section Nine. As they were passing three rows away from us, Korneff slid off the travertine slab and, in compliance with the cemetery regulations, we took our caps off for the procession from the pastor to the next of kin. Immediately after the coffin came, all alone, a lopsided little woman in black. Those who followed her were all much bigger and solidly built.

"Gawd a'mighty," Korneff groaned. "I got a feeling they're going to pop before we can get that slab up."

Meanwhile the funeral party had reached Section Nine, where it arranged itself and poured forth the pastor's voice, rising and falling. The concrete had contracted, and we could have put the pedestal on its foundations. But Korneff lay prone on the travertine slab. He slipped his cap under his forehead and pulled down the collar of his jacket and shirt, baring his neck, while the biography of the dear departed drifted over to us from Section Nine. I had to climb up on the slab and sit on Korneff's back. I took in the situation at a glance; there were two of them almost on top of each other. A straggler with an enormous wreath hurried toward Section Nine and the sermon that was drawing slowly to an end. I tore off the plaster at one tug, wiped away the ichthyol salve with a beech leaf, and examined the two indurations. They were almost the same size, tar-brown shading into yellow. "Let us pray," said the breeze from Section Nine. Taking this as a sign, I turned my head to one side and simultaneously pressed and pulled the beech leaves under my thumbs. "Our Father . . ." Korneff croaked: "Don't squeeze, pull." I pulled. ". . . be Thy name." Korneff managed to join in the prayer: ". . . Thy Kingdom come." Pulling didn't help, so I squeezed again. "Will be done, on as it is in." A miracle that there was no explosion. And once again: "give us this day." And again Korneff caught up the thread: "trespasses and not into temptation . . ." There was more of it than I had expected. "Kingdom and the power and the

glory." I squeezed out the last colorful remnant. ". . . and ever, amen." While I give a last squeeze, Korneff: "Amen," and a last pull: "Amen." As the folks over in Section Nine started on their condolences, Korneff said another amen. Still flat on the travertine slab, he heaved a sigh of relief: "Amen," to which he added: "Got some concrete left for under the pedestal?" Yes, I had. And he: "Amen."

I spread the last shovelfuls as a binder between the two posts. Then Korneff slid down off the polished inscription and Oskar showed him the autumnal beech leaves and the similarly colored contents of his boils. We put our caps back on, took hold of the stone, and, as the funeral in Section Nine dispersed, put up the slab that would mark the grave of Hermann Webknecht and Else Webknecht, née Freytag.

been late because, just to be mean, the head nurse had given her something to do just before five.

"Well, Miss Gertrude, may I offer a few suggestions? Let's first relax a while in a pastry shop and after that whatever you say: we could go to the movies, it's too late to get theater tickets, or how about a little dance?"

"Oh, yes, let's go dancing," she cried with enthusiasm. It was too late when she realized, but then with ill-concealed distress, that despite my finery I was hardly cut out to be her dancing partner.

With a certain malice—why hadn't she come in the nurse's uniform I was so fond of?—I confirmed the arrangements; she, for lack of imagination, soon forgot her fright, and joined me in consuming—I one piece, she three—some cake that must have had cement in it. After I had paid with money and cake stamps, we boarded the Gerresheim car, for if Korneff were to be believed, there was a dance hall below Grafenberg.

We did the last bit of the way slowly on foot, for the car stopped before the uphill stretch. A September evening by the book. Gertrude's wooden sandals, obtainable without coupons, clattered like the mill on the floss. The sound made me feel gay. The people coming downhill turned around to look at us. Miss Gertrude was embarrassed. I was used to it and took no notice. After all it was my cake stamps that had fed her three slices of cement cake at Kürten's Pastry Shop.

The dance hall was called Wedig's and subtitled the Lions' Den. There was tittering before we left the ticket window, and heads turned as we entered. Sister Gertrude was ill at ease in her civilian clothing and would have fallen over a folding chair if a waiter and I hadn't held her up. The waiter showed us a table near the dance floor, and I ordered two iced drinks, adding in an undertone audible only to the waiter: "But toss in a couple of shots, if you please."

The Lions' Den consisted chiefly of a large room that must once have been a riding academy. The rafters and bomb-scarred ceiling had been decorated with streamers and garlands from last year's carnival. Muted colored lights swung in circles, casting reflections on the resolutely slicked hair of the young black marketeers, some of them fashionably dressed, and the taffeta blouses of the girls, who all seemed to know each other.

When the drinks were served, I bought ten American

cigarettes from the waiter, offered Sister Gertrude one and gave another to the waiter, who stored it behind his ear. After giving my companion a light, I produced Oskar's amber cigarette holder and smoked half a Camel. The tables around us quieted down. Sister Gertrude dared to look up. When I crushed out my enormous Camel butt in the ash tray and left it there, Sister Gertrude picked it up with a practiced hand and tucked it away in the side pocket of her oilskin handbag.

"For my fiancé in Dortmund," she said. "He smokes like mad."

I was glad I wasn't her fiancé and glad too that the music had started up.

The five-piece band played "Don't Fence Me In." Males in crêpe soles dashed across the dance floor without colliding and appropriated young ladies who as they arose gave their bags to girl friends for safekeeping.

A few of the couples danced with a smoothness born of long practice. Quantities of gum were being ruminated; now and then a group of young black marketeers would stop dancing for a few measures to confer in Rhenish leavened with American slang while their partners, held vaguely by the arm, bobbed and joggled impatiently. Small objects exchanged hands: a true black marketeer never takes time off.

We sat the first dance out and the next foxtrot as well. I took an occasional look at the men's feet. When the music struck up "Rosamund," he asked a bewildered Sister Gertrude to dance.

Remembering Jan Bronski's choreographic arts, I, who was almost two heads shorter than Sister Gertrude, decided to try a *schieber*; I was well aware of the grotesque note we struck and determined to accentuate it. With resignation she let herself be led. I held her firmly by the rear end, thirty percent wool content; cheek to blouse, I pushed her, every pound of her, backward and followed in her footsteps. Sweeping away obstacles with our unbending side arms, we crossed the dance floor from corner to corner. It went better than I had dared to hope. I risked a variation or two. My cheek still clinging to her blouse, my hand still supported by her hips, I danced around her without relinquishing the classical posture of the *schieber*, whose purpose it is to suggest that she is about to fall backward and that he is about

to fall on top of her, though because they are such good dancers, they never actually fall.

Soon we had an audience. I heard cries such as: "Didn't I tell you it was Jimmy? Hey, take a look at Jimmy. Hello, Jimmy. Come on, Jimmy. Let's go, Jimmy."

Unfortunately, I couldn't see Sister Gertrude's face and could only hope that she was taking the applause in her stride as a well-meant homage. A nurse, after all, should be used to embarrassing flattery.

When we sat down, those around us were still clapping. The five-piece band did a flourish and another and another; the percussion man outdid himself. There were cries of "Jimmy!" And "Say, did you see those two?" At this point Sister Gertrude arose, mumbled something about going to the ladies' room, took her handbag containing the cigarette butt for her fiancé in Dortmund, and blushing scarlet, shoved her way, colliding with everything in her path, between chairs and tables, toward the ladies' room, which happened to be near the exit.

She never came back. Before leaving, she had drained her drink at one long gulp, a gesture that apparently means goodbye; Sister Gertrude had walked out on me.

And Oskar? An American cigarette in his amber holder, he ordered a straight schnaps from the waiter who was discreetly removing Sister Gertrude's empty glass. He was determined to smile at all costs. His smile may have been a bit sorrowful, but it was still a smile; folding his arms and crossing his legs, he wagged one delicate black shoe, size five, and savored the superiority of the forsaken.

The young habitués of the Lions' Den were very nice; it was a swing number, and they winked at me from the dance floor as they swung by. "Hello," cried the boys and "Take it easy" the girls. With a wave of my cigarette holder I thanked the repositories of true humanity and smirked indulgently as the percussion man gave a sumptuous roll and did a solo number on the drums, cymbals, and triangle, which reminded me of my good old rostrum days. The next dance, he then announced, would be ladies' invitation.

A hot number, "Jimmy the Tiger," meant for me no doubt, though no one at the Lions' Den could have known about my career as a disrupter of mass meetings. A fidgety little thing with a henna mop came over to me and, pausing a moment in her gum chewing, whispered in my ear with a voice

husky from smoking: "Jimmy the Tiger." I was the partner of her choice. Conjuring up jungle menaces, we danced Jimmy; the Tiger walked—for about ten minutes—on velvet paws. Again a flourish, applause and another flourish, because my hump was well dressed and I was nimble on my legs and cut a pretty good figure as Jimmy the Tiger. I asked my admirer to my table, and Helma—that was her name—asked if her girl friend Hannelore could come too. Hannelore was silent, sedentary, and hard-drinking. Helma, on the other hand, was addicted to American cigarettes, and I had to ask the waiter for some more.

A fine evening. I danced "Hey Bob A Re Bop," "In the Mood," "Shoeshine Boy," chatted between dances, and entertained the two young ladies, who were not very exacting and told me that they worked in the telephone exchange on Graf-Adolf-Platz and that lots of girls from the exchange came to Wedig's every Saturday and Sunday night. They themselves came regularly when they weren't on duty, and I too promised to come often, because Helma and Hannelore were so nice, and because telephone operators seemed so easy to get along with when there was no telephone—a little joke that they were good enough to laugh at.

It was a long while before I went back to the City Hospital. When I resumed my occasional visits, Sister Gertrude had been transferred to gynecology. I never saw her again except to wave to from a distance. I became a welcome habitué at the Lions' Den. The girls exploited me but not immoderately. Through them I made the acquaintance of several members of the British Army of Occupation and picked up a few dozen words of English. I made friends with a couple of the musicians, but controlled myself, that is, I kept away from the drums and contented myself with the modest happiness of cutting inscriptions at Korneff's.

During the hard winter of 1947 to 1948, I kept up my contact with the telephone girls. At no great expense, I obtained a certain amount of warmth from the silent, sedentary Hannelore, though we never went beyond the noncommittal manual stage.

In the winter the stonecutter took care of his equipment. The tools had to be reforged, a few leftover blocks were trimmed and made ready for their inscriptions. Korneff and I replenished our stores, which had been thinned out during the autumn season, and made a few artificial stones from shell-lime waste. I also tried my hand at some simple

sculpture with the stippling machine, did reliefs representing angels' heads, heads of Christ with crowns of thorns, and doves of the Holy Ghost. When snow fell, I shoveled it away, and when there was none, thawed out the water pipe leading to the polishing machine.

At the end of February, '48, soon after Ash Wednesday—I had lost weight during carnival and may have been looking rather ethereal, for some of the girls at the Lions' Den took to calling me Doctor—the first peasants from the left bank of the Rhine came over to look at our offerings. Korneff was absent on his annual rheumatism cure, tending a blast furnace in Duisburg. When he came back two weeks later, parched and boilless, I had already sold three stones, one of them for a tomb for three, on favorable terms. Korneff sold two slabs of Kirchheim shell lime; and early in March we began to set them up. One slab of Silesian marble went to Grevenbroich; the two Kirchheim stones are in a village cemetery near Neuss; the red sandstone with my angels' heads can still be admired in the cemetery at Stommel. At the end of March we loaded the diorite slab with the thorn-crowned Christ and drove slowly, because the three-wheeler was overloaded, in the direction of Kappes-Hamm, meaning to cross the Rhine at Neuss. From Neuss via Grevenbroich to Rommerskirchen, then left on the road to Bergheim Erft. Leaving Rheydt and Niederaussem behind us, we reached Oberaussem without breaking an axle. The cemetery was situated on a hill sloping gently toward the village.

Ah, the view! At our feet the Erftland soft coal country. The eight chimneys of the Fortuna Works, steaming heavenward. The new Fortuna North power plant, hissing as though about to explode. The mountains of slag surmounted by telfer lines. Every three minutes a train empty or full of coke, no larger than a toy, moving to or from the power plant; a larger toy, a toy for giants, was the high-tension line that swept across one corner of the cemetery on its way, three abreast, buzzing with high tension, to Cologne. Other lines hurried horizonward in other directions, to Belgium and Holland: hub of the world. We set up the diorite slab for the Flies family—electricity is generated by . . . The gravedigger with his helper, who substituted for Leo Schugger on this occasion, passed by with their implements. We were standing in a field of tension. Three rows away, they started to dig up a grave preparatory to moving its occupant—war reparations flowing over high-

tension wires—the wind carried the smells typical of a premature exhumation—not so bad, it was only March. Amid the coke piles the green fields of spring. The bows of the gravedigger's glasses were mended with string, he was arguing in an undertone with his Leo Schugger, until for exactly one minute the Fortuna siren gave a gasp, leaving us breathless, not to mention the woman whose remains were being moved, only the high-tension lines got on with their work. The siren tipped, fell overboard, and drowned—while from the slate-grey slate roofs of the village rose coils of smoke betokening the lunch hour, followed by the church bells: pray and work, industry and religion, boon companions. Change of shifts at Fortuna. We unwrapped our smoked pork sandwiches, but exhumation suffers no delay and the high-tension current continued without interruption on its way to the victor powers, to light the lamps of Holland, while here the juice was constantly being shut off—but the dead woman saw the light.

While Korneff dug the five-foot holes for the foundation, she was brought up into the fresh air. She hadn't been lying very long down in the darkness, only since the fall, and already she had made progress, keeping pace with the improvements that were everywhere under way. Those who were dismantling industrial plants in the Ruhr and Rhineland had progressed like anything; during the winter that I had frittered away at the Lions' Den, this woman had made serious progress and now, as we were laying on concrete and putting the pedestal in place, it was piece by piece that she had to be persuaded to let herself be dug up. But that's what the zinc casket was for, to prevent anything, even the most negligible part of her, from getting lost. Just as when free coal was distributed at Fortuna, children ran behind the overloaded trucks and picked up the chunks that fell out, because Cardinal Frings had proclaimed from the pulpit: Verily I say unto you, it is not a sin to filch coal. But for this woman there was no longer any need to keep up a fire. I don't think she was cold in the proverbially chilly March air, she had quite a good deal of skin left; to be sure it had sprung leaks and runners; but these were compensated for by vestiges of cloth and hair, the latter still permanently waved, hence the term. The coffin fittings were also worth moving and there were even bits of wood that wanted to go along to the other cemetery, where there would be no peasants or miners from Fortuna, for this next last

resting place was in the city where there was always something doing, nineteen movie houses operating all at once. For as the gravedigger told us, she wasn't from around here, she had been evacuated: "She was from Cologne, and now they're taking her to Mülheim on the other side of the Rhine." He would have said more if the siren hadn't gone off again for another minute. Taking advantage of the siren, I approached the grave; tacking against the siren, I wanted to witness this exhumation, and I took something with me which turned out, when I reached the zinc casket, to be my spade, which I put into action, not in order to help but because I happened to have it with me. On the blade I picked up something that had fallen on the ground. This spade had formerly been the property of the Reich Labor Service. And what I picked up on the Reich Labor Service spade was or had been the middle finger and, as I am still convinced, the ring finger of the evacuated woman; they had not fallen off but had been chopped off by the gravedigger, an unfeeling sort. But it seemed to me that they had been beautiful and adroit. Similarly the woman's head, which had already been placed in the casket, had preserved a certain regularity through the winter of '47 to '48, which was a severe one as you surely remember, and it was reasonably possible to speak of beauty, though on the decline. Moreover, this woman's head and fingers were closer to me, more human, than the beauty of Fortuna North. It seems safe to say that I enjoyed the industrial landscape as I had enjoyed Gustaf Gründgens at the theater—a surface beauty which I have always distrusted, though assuredly there was art in it, whereas the effect produced by this evacuee was only too natural. Granted that the high-tension lines, like Goethe, gave me a cosmic feeling, but the woman's fingers touched my heart. They still touched my heart when I began to think of her as a man, because it was more compatible with my thing about making decisions and with the fancy that transformed me into Yorick and the woman—half of her still in the earth, half in the zinc casket—into Hamlet. And I, Yorick, Act V, the fool. "I knew him, Horatio," Scene 1, I who on all the stages of the world—"Alas, poor Yorick!"—lend Hamlet my skull to that some Gründgens or Sir Laurence Olivier in the role of Hamlet may ponder over it: "Where be your gibes now, your gambols?" I held Gründgens' Hamlet fingers on the blade of the Labor Service shovel, stood in the cold ground in the

Rhenish soft coal fields, amid the graves of miners, peasants, and their families, and looked down on the slate roofs of the village of Oberaussem. The village cemetery became for me the center of the world, while Fortuna North stood there as the redoubtable demigod, my antagonist. The fields were the fields of Denmark; the Erft was my Belt, whatever rot lay round about was rotten in the state of Denmark—and I was Yorick. Charged with high tension, crackling, the high-tension angels, in lines of three, sang as they made their way to the horizon, to Cologne with its fabulous Gothic monster, heavenly hosts over the beet fields. But the earth yielded up coal and the corpse, not of Yorick but of Hamlet. As to the others, who had no parts in the play, they lay buried for good—"The rest is silence"—weighed down with tombstones just as we were weighing down the Flies family with this ponderous diorite slab. But for me, Oskar Matzerath Bronski Yorick, a new era was dawning, and scarcely aware of it, I took another quick look at Hamlet's worn-out fingers on the blade of my shovel—"He is fat and scant of breath"—I looked on as Gründgens, Act III, Scene 1, labored his dilemma about being or not being, rejected this absurd formulation, and put the question more concretely: "My son and my son's lighter flints, my presumptive earthly and heavenly father, my grandmother's four skirts, the beauty, immortalized in photographs, of my poor mama, the maze of scars on Herbert Truczinski's back, the blood-absorbing mail baskets at the Polish Post Office, America—but what is America compared to Streetcar Number 9 that went to Brösen? I considered Maria's scent of vanilla, still perceptible now and then, and my hallucination of Lucy Rennwand's triangular face; I asked Mr. Fajngold, that disinfector unto death, to search for the Party pin that had disappeared in Matzerath's windpipe. And at last, turning to Korneff, or more to the pylons of the power line, I said—my decision was made, but before coming out with it, I felt the need of a theatrical question that would cast doubt on Hamlet but legitimize me, Yorick, as a citizen—turning, then, to Korneff, who had called me because it was time to join our slab to the pedestal, I, stirred by the desire to become an honest citizen, said, slightly imitating Gründgens, although he could scarcely have played Yorick, said across the shovel blade: "To marry or not to marry, that is the question."

After this crisis at the cemetery facing Fortuna North, I

gave up dancing at Wedig's Lions' Den, broke off all connections with the girls at the telephone exchange, whose foremost quality had been their ability to provide connections.

In May I took Maria to the movies. After the show we went to a restaurant and ate relatively well. We had a heart to heart talk. Maria was dreadfully worried because Kurt's source was drying up, because the honey business was falling off, because I, weakling, so she put it, that I was, had been supporting the whole family for several months. I comforted Maria, told her that Oskar was glad to be doing what he could, that Oskar liked nothing better than to bear a heavy responsibility, complimented her on her looks, and finally came out with a proposal.

She asked for time to think it over. For weeks the only answer to my Yorick's question was silence and evasion; in the end it was answered by the currency reform.

Maria gave me innumerable reasons. She caressed my sleeve, called me "dear Oskar," said I was too good for this world, begged me to understand and always be her friend, wished me the best of everything for my future as a stone-cutter and otherwise, but when asked more explicitly and urgently, declined to marry me.

And so Yorick did not become a good citizen, but a Hamlet, a fool.

Maddonna 49

THE CURRENCY REFORM came too soon, it made a fool of me, compelling me in turn to reform Oskar's currency. I was obliged to capitalize, or at least to make a living from, my hump.

Yet I might have been a good citizen. The period following the currency reform, which—it has now become perfectly clear—contained all the seeds of the middle-class paradise we are living in today, might have brought out the bourgeois Oskar. As a husband and family man I should have participated in the reconstruction of Germany, I should now be the owner of a medium-sized stonecutting business, giving thirty workers their livelihood and providing office buildings and insurance palaces with the shell-lime and travertine façades that have become so popular: I should be a businessman, a family man, a respected member of society. But Maria turned me down.

It was then that Oskar remembered his hump and fell a victim to art. Before Korneff, whose existence as a maker of tombstones was also threatened by the currency reform, could dismiss me, I walked out. I took to standing on street-corners when I wasn't twiddling my thumbs in Guste Köster's kitchen-living room; I gradually wore out my tailor-made suit and began to neglect my appearance. There were no fights with Maria, but for fear of fights I would leave the flat in Bilk in the early forenoon. First I went to see the swans in Graf-Adolf-Platz, then I shifted to the swans in the Hofgarten. Small, thoughtful, but not embittered, I would sit on a park bench across the street from the Municipal Employment Agency and the Academy of Art, which are neighbors in Düsseldorf.

It is amazing how long a man can sit on a park bench; he sits till he turns to wood and feels the need of communicating with other wooden figures: old men who come only in good weather, old women gradually reverting to garrulous girlhood, children shouting as they play tag, lovers who will have to part soon, but not yet, not yet. The swans are

black, the weather hot, cold, or medium according to the season. Much paper is dropped; the scraps flutter about or lie on the walks until a man in a cap, paid by the city, spears them on a pointed stick.

Oskar was careful in sitting to blouse the knees of his trousers evenly. Of course I noticed the two emaciated young men and the girl in glasses before the girl—she had on a leather overcoat with an ex-Wehrmacht belt—addressed me. The idea seemed to have originated with her companions, who despite their sinister underworldly look were afraid to approach me, the hunchback, for they sensed my hidden greatness. It was the girl who summoned up the courage. She stood before me on firm, widely spaced columns until I asked her to sit down. There was a mist blowing up from the Rhine and her glasses were clouded over; she talked and talked, until I asked her to wipe her glasses and state her business intelligibly. Then she beckoned to her sinister companions. I had no need to question them; they introduced themselves at once as painters in search of a model. I was just what they were looking for, they said with an enthusiasm that was almost frightening. When I rubbed my thumb against my index and middle finger, they told me the Academy paid one mark eighty an hour, or two marks for posing in the nude, but that, said the stout girl, didn't seem very likely.

Why did Oskar say yes? Was it the lure of art? Or of lucre? No need to choose. It was both. I arose, leaving the park bench and the joys and sorrows of park bench existence behind me forever, and followed my new friends—the stout girl marching with determination, the two young men, stooped as though carrying their genius on their backs—past the Employment Agency to the partially demolished Academy of Art.

Professor Kuchen—black beard, coal-black eyes, black soft hat, black fingernails—agreed that I would be an excellent model.

For a time he walked around me, darting coal-black looks, breathing black dust from his nostrils. Throttling an invisible enemy with his black fingers, he declared: "Art is accusation, expression, passion. Art is a fight to the finish between black charcoal and white paper."

Professor Kuchen led me to a studio, lifted me up with his own hands on a revolving platform, and spun it about not in order to make me dizzy, but to display Oskar's proportions

permission, they made use of my hump, which was sharp and horny at the extremity, for experiments which were crowned with success, once more confirming my thesis that a hump is good luck to women.

In the long run, however, these occupations made me more and more morose. Thoughts plagued me, I began to worry about the political situation; I painted the blockade of Berlin on the table top with champagne and sketched out a picture of the air lift. Contemplating these Chinese girls who couldn't get together, I despaired of the reunification of Germany and did something that is very unlike me. Oskar, in the role of Yorick, began to look for the meaning of life.

When my girl friends could think of nothing more to show me, they began to cry, leaving telltale traces in their oriental make-up. Slashed and baggy and powdered, I stood up, ringing my bells. Two-thirds of me wanted to go home, but the remaining third still hoped for some little carnivalesque experience. It was then that I caught sight of Corporal Lankes, that is, he spoke to me.

Do you remember? We met on the Atlantic Wall during the summer of '44. He had guarded concrete and smoked my master Bebra's cigarettes.

A dense crowd sat necking on the stairs. I tried to squeeze through. I had just lighted up when someone poked me and a corporal from the last war spoke: "Hi, buddy, can you spare a butt?"

Quite aside from these familiar words, he was costumed in field grey. Small wonder that I recognized him at once. Even so, I should have made no move to revive our acquaintance if the young lady sitting on the corporal and concrete painter's field-grey lap had not been the Muse in person.

Let me speak with the painter first and describe the Muse afterwards. I not only gave him a cigarette, but even lighted it for him, and said as the first cloud of smoke arose: "Corporal Lankes, do you remember? Bebra's Theater at the Front? Barbaric, mystical, bored?"

A tremor ran through the painter as I addressed him in these terms; he managed to keep a hold on his cigarette, but the Muse fell from his knees. She was hardly more than a child, long-legged and very drunk. I caught her in mid-air and returned her to him. As the two of us, Lankes and Oskar, exchanged reminiscences with a disparaging remark or two for Lieutenant Herzog, whom Lankes called a nut, and a

thought for Bebra my master as well as the nuns who had been picking up crabs that day amid the Rommel asparagus, I gazed in amazement at the Muse. She had come as an angel and had on a hat molded from the variety of cardboard that is used for shipping eggs. Despite her drooping wings and far-advanced drunkenness, she still exerted the somewhat artsy-craftsy charm of a dweller in heaven.

"This here is Ulla," Lankes informed me. "She studied to be a dressmaker, but now she wants to be an artist, but I say to hell with it, with dressmaking she can bring in some dough."

Oskar, who made a good living on art, offered forthwith to introduce Ulla to the painters at the Academy, who would be sure to take her on as a model and Muse. Lankes was so delighted with my proposal that he helped himself to three cigarettes at once, but in return asked me to come see his studio if I didn't mind paying the taxi fare.

Off we rode, leaving the carnival behind us. I paid the fare, and Lankes, on his alcohol stove, made us some coffee that revived the Muse. Once she had relieved the weight on her stomach with the help of my right forefinger, she seemed almost sober.

Only then did I see the look of wonderment in her light-blue eyes and hear her voice, which was a little birdlike, a little tinny perhaps, but touching in its way and not without charm. Lankes submitted my proposal that she should pose at the Academy, putting it more as an order than as a suggestion. At first she refused; she wished to be neither a Muse nor a model for other painters, but to belong to Lankes alone.

Thereupon he, as talented painters sometimes do, gave her a resounding slap in the face; then he asked her again and chuckled with satisfaction when, weeping just as angels would weep, she professed her willingness to become the waiting model and maybe even the Muse of the painters at the Academy.

It must be borne in mind that Ulla measures roughly five feet ten; she is exceedingly slender, lithe, and fragrant, reminding one of Botticelli, Cranach, or both. We painted her in the nude. Lobster meat has just about the color of her long, smooth flesh, which is covered with a light down. The hair on her head is perhaps a trifle longer and straw-blond. Her pubic hair is reduced to a small triangle. Ulla has a bath and a haircut regularly once a week.

played with his doorknob. Who could have resisted? Who does not look up at the passage of something which is passing perhaps for him? Who can sit still in his chair when every nearby sound seems to serve the sole purpose of making him jump up?

Still worse is the silence. We have seen the power of silence in connection with the female figurehead, wooden, silent, and passive. There lay the first museum attendant in his blood. And everyone said Niobe had killed him. The director looked for a new attendant, for the museum had to be kept open. When the second attendant was dead, everyone screamed that Niobe had killed him. The museum director had difficulty in finding a third attendant—or was it already the eleventh he was looking for? One day, in any case, this attendant it had been so hard to find was dead. And everyone screamed: Niobe, Niobe of the green paint and amber eyes; wooden Niobe, naked, unbreathing, unsweating, untrembling, suffering neither heat nor cold; Niobe, wormless because, what with her historical value, she had been sprayed against worms. A witch was burned on her account, the woodcarver's hand was cut off, ships sank, but she floated, she survived. Niobe was wooden but fireproof, Niobe killed and remained valuable. Schoolboys, students, an elderly priest, and a bevy of museum attendants all fell prey to her silence. My friend Herbert Truczinski jumped her and died; but Niobe, still dry, only increased in silence.

When the nurse left her room, the hallway, and the Hedgehog's apartment early in the morning, at about six o'clock, it became very still, though when present she had never made any noise. Unable to stand the silence, Oskar had to coax a squeak or two from his bed, move a chair, or roll an apple in the direction of the bathtub.

Toward eight o'clock a rustling. That was the postman dropping letters and postcards through the slit in the outer door. Not only Oskar, but Mrs. Zeidler as well had been waiting for that sound. She was a secretary at the offices of the Mannesmann Company and didn't go to work until nine o'clock. She let me go first; it was Oskar who first looked into the rustling. I moved quietly though I knew she could hear me just the same, and left my room door open in order not to have to switch on the light. I picked up all the mail at once. Regularly once a week there was a letter from Maria, giving a complete account of herself, the child, and her sister Guste. Having secreted it in my pa-

jama pocket, I would look quickly through the rest of the mail. Everything addressed to the Zeidlers or to a certain Mr. Münzer who lived at the end of the hallway, I would replace on the floor. As for Sister Dorothea's mail, I would turn it over, smell it, feel it, and examine the return address.

Sister Dorothea received more mail than I, but not very much. Her full name was Dorothea Köngetter; but I called her only Sister Dorothea and occasionally forgot her last name—what, indeed, does a trained nurse need a last name for? She received letters from her mother in Hildesheim. There were also postcards from all over West Germany, most of them with pictures of ivy-covered hospitals, written by nurses she had known at training school, obviously in reply to Sister Dorothea's halting efforts to keep up with her old friends.

Nearly all these communications, as Oskar soon found out, were quite rapid and unrevealing. Nevertheless, they threw some light on Sister Dorothea's past; she had worked at the Vinzent-Hospital in Cologne, at a private clinic in Aachen, and in Hildesheim, where her mother was still living. It could be inferred either that she was from Lower Saxony or that like Oskar she was a refugee from the East and had settled there after the war. I also found out that Sister Dorothea was working nearby, at the Marien-Hospital, that she had a close friend by the name of Beata, for the postcards were full of references to, and regards for, this Sister Beata.

The existence of a girl friend gave me wild ideas. I composed letters to Beata, in one I asked her to intercede for me, in the next I said nothing about Dorothea, my idea being to approach Beata first and switch to Dorothea later on. I drafted five or six letters and even addressed one or two; several times I started for the mailbox, but none was ever sent.

Yet perhaps, in my madness, I would actually have mailed one of these pleas to Sister Beata had I not—one Monday it was, the day Maria started up with Mr. Stenzel, her boss, an occurrence that left me surprisingly cold—found on the floor, below the letter slot, the missive which transformed my passion from love to jealous love.

The name and address printed on the envelope told me that the letter had been written by a Dr. Erich Werner at the Marien-Hospital. On Tuesday a second letter came. Thursday brought a third. What shall I say of my state of

mind on that Thursday? Oskar tottered back to his room, fell on one of the kitchen chairs which helped to turn my bathroom into a place of residence, and drew Maria's weekly letter from his pajama pocket—in spite of her love affair Maria continued to write punctually, neatly, and exhaustively. Oskar even tore open the envelope and gazed at the letter with sightless eyes; he heard Mrs. Zeidler in the hall, calling Mr. Münzer, who did not answer. But Münzer must have been in, for Mrs. Zeidler opened his room door, handed in the mail, and kept on talking to him.

Mrs. Zeidler was still talking but I could no longer hear her. I surrendered myself to the madness of the wallpaper, the vertical, horizontal, diagonal madness, the curved madness, reproduced a thousandfold; I saw myself as Matzerath, eating the alarmingly nutritious bread of cuckolds; and no shame or scruple deterred me from representing my Jan Bronski as a seducer in Satanic make-up, clad by turns in the traditional overcoat with velvet collar, in Dr. Hollatz' white smock, and in the equally white smock of Dr. Werner, in every case seducing, corrupting, desecrating, insulting, scourging, and torturing, in short, doing everything a seducer has to do if he is to be plausible.

Today I can smile when I recall the idea which then turned Oskar as yellow and mad as the wallpaper: I decided to study medicine. I would graduate in no time. I would become a doctor, at the Marien-Hospital, of course. I would expose Dr. Werner, demonstrate his incompetence, nay more, prove that his criminal negligence had been responsible for the death of a patient in the course of a larynx operation. It would turn out that this Mr. Werner had never attended medical school. He had picked up a smattering of medicine while working as an orderly in a field hospital during the war. Off to jail with the charlatan. And Oskar, despite his youth, becomes head physician. A new Professor Sauerbruch, with Sister Dorothea at his side, followed by a white-clad retinue, strides down resounding corridors, visits his patients, decides at the last minute to operate. How fortunate that this film was never made!

In the Clothes Cupboard

IT SHOULD NOT be supposed that Oskar's whole life was taken up with nurses. After all, I had my professional occupations. I had to give up cutting inscriptions, the summer semester at the Academy had begun. Once again Ulla and I received good money for sitting still while art students, employing methods old or new, subjected us to their vision or blindness. There were many who destroyed our objective existence, rejected and negated us, covering paper and canvas with lines, rectangles, spirals, producing wallpaper designs which had everything in them but Oskar and Ulla, or mystery and tension if you will, and giving these absurdities high-sounding titles such as "Plaited Upward," "Hymn above Time", "Red in New Spaces".

This manner was particularly favored by the younger students who had not yet learned to draw. We fared better at the hands of my old friends from the studios of Kuchen and Maruhn, not to mention the prize students Ziege and Raskolnikov.

In her earthly existence the Muse Ulla revealed a marked taste for applied art. Lankes had left her but in her enthusiasm for the new wallpaper designs she soon forgot him and convinced herself that the decorative abstractions of a middle-aged painter named Meitel were sweet, amusing, cute, fantastic, terrific, and even chic. Meitel had a special fondness for forms suggesting sugary-syrupy Easter eggs, but that is hardly worth mentioning; since then she has found many other occasions to become engaged and at the present moment—as she informed me when she came to see me the day before yesterday, with candy for me and Bruno—is on the point of entering upon a serious and lasting relationship, as she has always put it.

At the beginning of the semester, Ulla wanted to pose only for the "new trends"—a flea that Meiter, her Easter egg painter, had put in her ear; his engagement present to her had been a vocabulary which she tried out in conversations with me. She spoke of relationships, constellations, accents,

perspectives, granular structures, processes of fusion, phenomena of erosion. She, whose daily fare consisted exclusively of bananas and tomato juice, spoke of proto-cells, color atoms which in their dynamic flat trajectories found their natural positions in their fields of forces, but did not stop there; no, they went on and on . . . This was the tone of her conversation with me during our rest periods or when we went out for an occasional cup of coffee in Ratinger-Strasse. Even when her engagement to the dynamic painter of Easter eggs had ceased to be, even when after a brief episode with a Lesbian she took up with one of Kuchen's students and returned to the objective world, she retained this vocabulary which so strained her little face that two sharp, rather fanatical creases formed on either side of her mouth.

Here I must admit that it was not entirely Raskolnikov's idea to dress the Muse Ulla as a nurse and paint her with Oskar. After the "Madonna 49" he put us into "The Abduction of Europa"—I was the bull. And immediately after the rather controversial "Abduction" came "Fool Heals Nurse".

It was a little word of mine that fired Raskolnikov's imagination. Somber, red-haired, and crafty, he cleaned his brushes and brooded; staring fixedly at Ulla, he began to speak of guilt and atonement. At this I advised him to picture me as guilt, Ulla as atonement; my guilt, I said, was patent; as for Atonement, why not dress her as a nurse?

If this excellent picture later bore another, misleadingly different title, it was Raskolnikov's doing. I myself should have called it "Temptation", because my right, painted hand was gripping and turning a doorknob, opening the door to a room where The Nurse is standing. Or it might have been called "The Doorknob", for if I were asked to think up a new name for temptation, I should recommend the word "doorknob", because what are these protuberances put on doors for if not to tempt us, because the doorknob on the frosted-glass door of Sister Dorothea's room was to me temptation itself whenever I knew that Hedgehog Zeidler was on the road, Sister Dorothea at the hospital, and Mrs. Zeidler in the office at Mannesmann's.

Oskar would emerge from his room with the drainless bathtub, cross the hallway, approach the nurse's room, and grip the doorknob.

Until about the middle of June—and I made the experiment almost every day—the door had resisted my temptation. I was beginning to think that Sister Dorothea's work

had just made her too orderly in her ways, that I might as well give up hope of her ever neglecting to lock it. And that is why, when one day the door opened under my pressure, my dull-witted, mechanical reaction was to close it again.

For several minutes Oskar stood there in a very tight skin, a prey to so many thoughts of the most divergent origins that his heart had difficulty in imposing any sort of arrangement upon them.

It was only after I had transferred my thoughts to another context—Maria and her lover, I thought; Maria has a lover, lover gives her a coffee pot, lover and Maria go to the Apollo on Saturday night, Maria addresses lover as Mr. So-and-So during working hours, he is her boss, owner of the store where she works—only after I had thus considered Maria and her lover from various angles, that I managed to create a little order in my poor brain. . . and opened the frosted-glass door.

I had already figured out that the room must be windowless, for never had the upper, dimly transparent part of the door revealed the slightest trace of daylight. Reaching to the right, exactly as in my own room, I found the switch. The forty-watt bulb was quite sufficient for this cubbyhole which hardly deserved to be called a room. I was rather distressed to find myself face to face with my bust in the mirror. Though his reverse image had nothing to tell him, Oskar did not move away; he was too fascinated by the objects on the dressing table in front of the mirror.

There were blue-black spots in the white enamel of the washbasin. The table top in which the washbasin was sunk almost to the rim also had blemishes. The left corner was missing and the missing piece lay on the table top under the mirror, showing the mirror its veins. Traces of peeling glue on the broken edge bore witness to a bungled attempt to repair the damage. My stonecutter's fingers itched. I thought of Korneff's homemade marble cement, which transformed even the most dilapidated marble into enduring slabs fit to adorn the façades of large butcher stores.

Once these familiar thoughts had diverted me from my cruelly distorted image in the mirror, I was able to give the smell that had struck me the moment I came in a name.

It was vinegar. Later, and again only a few weeks ago, I justified that acrid smell by the assumption that Sirothea must have washed her hair the day before.

put vinegar in the rinse water. However, there was no vinegar bottle on the dressing table. Nor did I detect vinegar in any of the containers otherwise labeled; moreover, I have often said to myself, would Sister Dorothea be likely to heat water in the Zeidler kitchen, for which she would have required Zeidler's permission, and go through the bother of washing her hair in her room, when the hospital is full of the best showers and bathrooms? Yet possibly the head nurse or the hospital management had forbidden the nurses to use certain sanitary installations in the hospital; perhaps Sister Dorothea actually was obliged to wash her hair in this enamel bowl, in front of this deceitful mirror.

Though there was no vinegar bottle on the table, there were plenty of other bottles and jars on the clammy marble. A package of cotton and a half-empty package of sanitary napkins discouraged Oskar from investigating the contents of the little jars. But I am still of the opinion that they contained nothing but routine cosmetics or harmless medicinal ointments.

Sister Dorothea had left her comb in her brush. It cost me a struggle to pull it out and take a good look at it. How fortunate that I did so, for in that instant Oskar made his important discovery; the nurse's hair was blonde, perhaps ashblonde, but one cannot be too suspicious of conclusions drawn from the dead hair that comes out in a comb. Suffice it to say that Sister Dorothea had blonde hair.

In addition, the alarmingly abundant contents of the comb told me that Sister Dorothea suffered from falling hair, an ailment that must have distressed her. It's the fault of her nurse's caps, I said to myself; but I did not condemn them, for how can a hospital be run properly without nurses' caps?

Distasteful as the vinegar smell was to Oskar, the only sentiment aroused in me by the thought that Sister Dorothea was losing her hair was love, seasoned with solicitude and compassion. It is characteristic of the state I was in that I thought of several hair lotions I had heard recommended and resolved to supply Sister Dorothea with one or more of them at the first opportunity. Dreaming of our first meeting, which would take place beneath a warm summer sky, amid fields of waving grain, I plucked the homeless hairs from the comb and arranged them in a bundle, which I secured by tying a knot in it. I blew off some of the dust and dandruff and carefully secreted my treasure in a compartment

of my wallet from which I had quickly removed its previous contents.

Having stowed my wallet in my jacket, I picked up the comb, which I had laid down on the table top for want of hands. I held it up to the naked light bulb, making it transparent, examined the two rows of prongs, coarse and fine, and noted that two of the finer prongs were missing. I could not resist the temptation to run the nail of my left forefinger over the tips of the coarse prongs, and while thus playing Oskar was gladdened by the glitter of a few hairs which, to avert suspicion, I had intentionally neglected to remove.

At length I dropped the comb back into the brush and left the dressing table, which, it seemed to me, was giving me an unbalanced picture. On my way to Sister Dorothea's bed I bumped into a chair on which hung a brassiere—much washed, I noted, and faded at the edges.

Oskar had nothing but his fists with which to fill the two concavities. They were inadequate. Too hard, too nervous, they were alien and unhappy in these bowls which in my ignorance of their contents I should gladly have lapped up with a teaspoon day after day; I might have experienced a little nausea now and then, for too much of any fare will unsettle the stomach, but after nausea sweetness, such sweetness as to make nausea desirable, the seal of true love.

I thought of Dr. Werner and took my fists out of the brassiere. But then Dr. Werner vanished and I was able to approach Sister Dorothea's bed. So this was her bed! How often Oskar had tried to visualize it, and now it was the same hideous wooden structure, painted brown, that served as a setting for my own repose and occasional insomnia. What I should have wished for her was a white-enameled metal bed with brass knobs, a light, immaterial frame, and not this cumbersome and loveless object. Immobile, with heavy head, devoid of passion, incapable even of jealousy, I stood for a time gazing at this altar of sleep—the comforter, it seemed to me, must be granite. Then I turned away from the loathsome sight. Never could Oskar have visualized Sister Dorothea and her slumbers in this repulsive tomb.

I started back toward the dressing table, planning perhaps to open the presumed ointment jars. On my way, the clothes cupboard commanded me to note its dimensions, to qualify its paint as black-brown, to follow the colours of

its molding, and at last to open it; for where is the cupboard that does not demand to be opened?

There was no lock, the doors were held together by a bent nail; I turned it to a vertical position and at once, with no help from me, the doors swung apart with a sigh, offering me so wide a vista that I had to step backward to take it all in. Oskar didn't want to lose himself in details as he had at the dressing table; nor did he wish, as in the case of the bed, to let prejudice pass judgment; no, he was determined to give himself to that cupboard, which opened out its arms to him, with the freshness of the first day of Creation.

Nevertheless Oskar, the incorrigible esthete, could not refrain entirely from criticism: some barbarian had hurriedly sawed off the legs, tearing splinters out of the wood, and set the disfigured cupboard down flat on the floor.

The inside was in the best of order. On the right there were three deep shelves piled with undergarments and blouses; white, pink, and a light blue which Oskar felt certain would not discolor. Two red and green oilcloth bags hung inside the right-hand door, one containing stockings with runs, the other stockings Sister Dorothea had mended. These stockings, it seemed to me, were equal in quality to those that Maria's employer and boy friend had given her, but of closer weave and more durable. To the left hung starched, gleaming white nurse's uniforms. In the hat compartment on top, in beauty and simplicity, sat the fragile nurse's caps, fearing the touch of any unpracticed hand. I cast only a brief glance at the civilian clothes to the left of the undergarments. The cheap, haphazard assortment confirmed my secret hope: Sister Dorothea was not deeply interested in this department of her clothing. And the same impression was conveyed by the three or four pot-shaped hats with imitation flowers, which, tossed negligently in a heap beside the caps, suggested nothing so much as an unsuccessful cake. The hat compartment also contained ten or a dozen books with colored backs, leaning on a shoe box filled with wool left over from knitting.

Oskar had to step closer and tilt his head in order to read the titles. It was with an indulgent smile that my head resumed a vertical position: so our good Sister Dorothea read crime novels. But I have said enough about the civilian section of the cupboard. Lured closer by the books, I did not retreat; quite on the contrary, I stuck my head in the

cupboard and ceased to resist my mounting desire to belong to it, to become a part of the clothes cupboard where Sister Dorothea kept a not inappreciable part of her visible presence.

I didn't even have to move the sensible low-heeled shoes that stood on the cupboard floor, meticulously polished and waiting to go out. As though to invite me in, the contents of the cupboard were so arranged that Oskar was able, without crushing a single garment, to take shelter in the middle of it. Full of anticipation, I crawled in and squatted on my heels.

At first, however, my mind was not at rest. Oskar felt himself observed by the furniture and the light bulb. Wishing to make my sojourn in the cupboard more intimate, I tried to pull the doors shut. It was none too easy, the catch was worn out, the doors refused to close properly. Light still entered, but not enough to disturb me. The smell became more concentrated. An old-fashioned, clean smell, no longer of vinegar, but of some mild moth deterrent; a good smell.

What did Oskar do as he sat in the cupboard? He leaned his forehead against Sister Dorothea's nearest uniform, which opened the door to every aspect of life. My left hand, perhaps in search of something for me to lean on, reached backward, past the civilian clothes, went astray, lost its hold, shot out, gripped something smooth and flexible, and finally—still holding the smoothness—found a horizontal strut, intended to support the rear wall of the cupboard, but willing to do the same for me. My hand was free, I brought it forward and showed myself what I had found behind me.

I saw a black leather belt, but instantly I saw more than the belt because it was so grey in the cupboard that a patent-leather belt could easily be something else. It might just as well have been something different, something just as smooth and long, something I had seen as an incorrigible three-year-old drummer on the harbor breakwater at Neufahrwasser: my poor mama in her light-blue spring coat with the raspberry-colored facings, Matzerath in his brown overcoat, Jan Bronski with his velvet collar, Oskar in his sailor hat with the gold-embroidered inscription "S.M.S. Seydlitz"; ulster and velvet collar jumped on ahead of me and Mama, who because of her high heels could not jump from stone to stone as far as the beacon, at the foot of which sat the longshoreman with the clothesline and the potato sack full of salt and movement. At the sight of the sack

line, we asked the man under the beacon why he was fishing with a clothesline, but this fellow from Neufahrwasser or Brösen just laughed and spat out viscous brown juice, which bobbed up and down in the water beside the breakwater and didn't stir from the spot until a seagull carried it away; for a seagull will pick up anything under the sun, it's not one of your picky-and-choosy doves, nor is it by any stretch of the imagination a nurse—wouldn't it be just too simple if you could lump everything white under one head and toss it into a cupboard? And the same goes for black, for in those days I was not yet afraid of the wicked black Witch, I sat fearless in the cupboard and then again not in the cupboard, but equally fearless on the breakwater in Neufahrwasser, in the one case holding a patent-leather belt, in the other something else, which was also black and slippery but not a belt. Because I was in the cupboard, I cast about for a comparison, for cupboards force comparisons, called the wicked black Witch by name, but at that time she meant little to me, I was farther gone on the subject of white, scarcely able to distinguish between a gull and Sister Dorothea. Nevertheless, I expelled doves, pigeons, and all such rot from my thoughts, all the more readily as it wasn't Pentecost but Good Friday when we rode out to Brösen and continued on to the breakwater—besides, there were no pigeons over the breakwater where this fellow from Neufahrwasser was sitting with his clothesline, sitting and spitting. And when the longshoreman from Brösen pulled the line in until the line stopped and showed why it had been so hard to pull it out of the brackish waters of the Mottlau, when my poor mama laid her hand on Jan Bronski's shoulder and velvet collar, because her face was as green as green cheese, because she wanted to go away but had to look on as this longshoreman flung the horse's head down on the stones, as the smaller, sea-green eels fell out of the mane and he pulled the larger, darker ones out of the cadaver. Someone ripped open a featherbed which is just a way of saying that the gulls swooped down and set to, because gulls, when there are three or more of them, can easily finish off a small eel, though they have a bit of trouble with the bigger fellows. The longshoreman wrenched open the horse's mouth, forced a piece of wood between the teeth, which made the horse laugh, and reached in with his hairy arm, groped and reached some more, like me in the cupboard, and extracted, as I in the cupboard had ex-

tracted the patent-leather belt, two eels at once. He swung them through the air and dashed them against the stones, until my poor mama's face disgorged her whole breakfast, consisting of café au lait, egg white and egg yolk, a bit of jam, and a few lumps of white bread. So copious was that breakfast that in an instant the gulls had assumed an oblique position, come a story lower, and fallen to—I won't even mention the screams, and that gulls have wicked eyes is generally known. They wouldn't be driven off, not in any case by Jan Bronski, for he was scared stiff of gulls and held both hands before his frantic blue eyes. They wouldn't even pay any attention to my drum, but gobbled, while I with fury, but also with enthusiasm, created many a new rhythm on my drum. But to my poor mama it was all one, she was too busy; she gagged and gagged, but nothing more would come up, she hadn't eaten so very much, for my mama was trying to lose weight and did gymnastics twice a week at the Women's Association, but it didn't help because she kept eating in secret and always found some little loophole in her resolutions. As for the man from Neufahrwasser, when all present thought it was over, there could be no more, he, in defiance of all theory, pulled one last eel out of the horse's ear. It was all full of white porridge, it had been exploring the horse's brains. But the longshoreman swung it about until the porridge fell off, until the eel showed its varnish and glittered like a patent-leather belt. What I am trying to get at is that Sister Dorothea wore just such a belt when she went out in civvies, without her Red Cross pin.

We started homeward although Matzerath wanted to stay on because a Finnish ship of some eighteen hundred tons was putting into port and making waves. The longshoreman left the horse's head on the breakwater. A moment later the horse turned white and screamed. But he didn't scream like a horse, he screamed more like a cloud that is white and voracious and descends on a horse's head. Which was all to the good, because now the horse was hidden from sight, though one could imagine what was at the bottom of that white frenzy. The Finn diverted us too; he was as rusty as the fence in Saspe Cemetery and was carrying timber. But my poor mama turned to look neither at the Finn nor the gulls. She was done in. Though formerly she had not only played "Fly, little seagull, fly away to Heligoland" on our piano, but sung it as well, she never sang that song again or anything else for that matter; at first she would not any

more fish, but suddenly she began to eat so much fish, such big fish and fat fish, that one day she couldn't, wouldn't eat any more, that she was sick of it, sick of eels and sick of life, especially of men, perhaps also of Oskar, in any case she, who had never been able to forgo anything, became frugal and abstemious and had herself buried in Brenntau. I have inherited this combination of self-indulgence and frugality. I want everything but there's nothing I cannot do without—except for smoked eels; whatever the price, I can't live without them. And another such exception was Sister Dorothea, whom I had never seen, whose patent-leather belt I was not really wild about—and yet I could not tear myself away from it, it was endless, it multiplied, and with my free hand I unbuttoned my trousers in order to reclarify my image of Sister Dorothea, which had been blurred by the Finnish merchantman and those innumerable varnished eels.

Finally Oskar, with the help of the gulls, managed to shake off his obsession with the breakwater and rediscover Sister Dorothea's world amid her empty, yet winsome uniforms. But when at last I could see her before me and distinguish certain of her features, suddenly, with a screech and a whine, the cupboard doors swung open; the bright light upset me, and it cost me an effort not to soil the smock that hung closest to me.

Only in order to create a transition, to relax the tension of my stay in the cupboard, which had been more strenuous than I had expected, I did something I had not done for years; I drummed a few measures, nothing very brilliant, on the dry rear wall of the cupboard. Then I emerged, checked once more for neatness; I had created no disorder, even the patent-leather belt had preserved its sheen, no, there were a few dull spots that had to be breathed on and rubbed before the belt became once again an object capable of suggesting eels that were caught many years before on the harbor breakwater at Neufahrwasser.

I, Oskar, cut off the current from the forty-watt bulb that had watched me throughout my visit and left Sister Dorothea's room.

Klepp

THERE I WAS in the hallway with a bundle of pale blonde hair in my pocket book. For a second I tried to feel the hair through the leather, through the lining of my jacket, through my waistcoat, shirt, and undershirt; but I was too weary, too satisfied in a strangely morose way to look upon my treasure as anything more than leavings found on a comb.

Only then did Oskar own to himself that he had been looking for treasures of a very different kind. What I had really wanted was to demonstrate the presence of Dr. Werner somewhere in Sister Dorothea's room, if only by finding a letter or one of those envelopes I knew so well. I found nothing. Not so much as an envelope, let alone a sheet of paper with writing on it. Oskar owns that he removed the crime novels, one by one, from the hat compartment and opened them, looking for dedications and bookmarks. I was also looking for a picture, for Oskar knew most of the doctors of the Marien-Hospital by sight though not by name—but there was no photograph of Dr. Werner.

Sister Dorothea's room seemed unknown to Dr. Werner, and if he had ever seen it, he had not succeeded in leaving any traces. Oskar had every reason to be pleased. Didn't I have a considerable advantage over the doctor? Wasn't the absence of any trace of him proof positive that the relations between doctor and nurse were confined to the hospital, hence purely professional, and that if there was anything personal about them, it was unilateral?

Nevertheless, Oskar's jealousy clamored for a motive. Though the slightest sign of Dr. Werner would have come as a blow to me, it would at the same time have given me a satisfaction incommensurable with my brief little adventure in the cupboard.

I don't remember how I made my way back to my room, but I do recall hearing a mock cough, calculated to attract attention, behind Mr. Münzer's door at the end of the hall. What was this Mr. Münzer to me? Didn't I have my hands full with Sister Dorothea? Was it any time to burden myself

more fish, but suddenly she began to eat so much fish, such big fish and fat fish, that one day she couldn't, wouldn't eat any more, that she was sick of it, sick of eels and sick of life, especially of men, perhaps also of Oskar, in any case she, who had never been able to forgo anything, became frugal and abstemious and had herself buried in Brenntau. I have inherited this combination of self-indulgence and frugality. I want everything but there's nothing I cannot do without—except for smoked eels; whatever the price, I can't live without them. And another such exception was Sister Dorothea, whom I had never seen, whose patent-leather belt I was not really wild about—and yet I could not tear myself away from it, it was endless, it multiplied, and with my free hand I unbuttoned my trousers in order to reclarify my image of Sister Dorothea, which had been blurred by the Finnish merchantman and those innumerable varnished eels.

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with this Münzer—who knows what the name might conceal? And so Oskar failed to hear the inviting cough, or rather, I failed to understand what was wanted of me, and realized only after I was back in my room that this Mr. Münzer, this total stranger who meant nothing to me, had coughed in order to lure Oskar to his room.

I admit it: for a long while I was sorry I had not reacted to that cough, for my room seemed so cramped and at the same time so enormous that a conversation, even of the most forced and tedious kind, with the coughing Mr. Münzer would have done me good. But I could not summon up the courage to establish a delayed contact—I might, for instance, have gone out into the corridor and given an answering cough—with the gentleman behind the door at the end of the hallway. I surrendered passively to the unyielding angularity of my kitchen chair, grew restless as I always do when sitting in chairs, took up a medical reference book from the bed, dropped the expensive tome I had spent my good money on in a disorderly heap, and picked up Raskolnikov's present, the drum, from the table. I held it, but neither could I take the sticks to it nor was Oskar able to burst into tears that would have fallen on the round white lacquer and brought me a rhythmical relief.

Here I could embark on an essay about lost innocence, a comparison between two Oskars, the permanently three-year-old drummer and the voiceless, tearless, drumless hunchback. But that would be an oversimplification and would not do justice to the facts: even in his drumming days, Oskar lost his innocence more than once and recovered it or waited for it to grow in again; for innocence is comparable to a luxuriant weed—just think of all the innocent grandmothers who were once loathsome, spiteful infants—no, it was not any absurd reflections about innocence and lost innocence that made Oskar jump up from the kitchen chair; no, it was my love for Sister Dorothea that commanded me to replace the drum undrugged, to leave room, hallway, and flat, and hasten to the Academy although my appointment with Professor Kuchen was not until late in the afternoon.

When Oskar left the room with faltering tread, stepped out into the corridor, opened the apartment door as ostentatiously as possible, I listened for a moment in the direction of Mr. Münzer's door. He did not cough. Shamed, revolted, satiated and hungry, sick of living and avid for life, I was

on the verge of tears as I left, first the flat, then the house in Jülicher-Strasse.

A few days later I carried out a long-cherished plan, which I had spent so much time rejecting that I had prepared it in every detail. That day I had the whole morning free. Not until three were Oskar and Ulla expected to pose for the ingenious Raskolnikov, I as Ulysses who in homecoming presents Penelope with a hump—something he had grown during his absence no doubt. In vain I tried to talk the artist out of this idea. For some time he had been successfully exploiting the Greek gods and demigods and Ulla felt quite at home in mythology. In the end I gave in and allowed myself to be painted as Vulcan, as Pluto with Proserpina, and finally, that afternoon, as a humpbacked Ulysses. But because I am more concerned with the events of the morning, Oskar will not tell you how the Muse Ulla looked as Penelope, but say instead: all was quiet in the Zeidler flat. The Hedgehog was on the road with his hair clippers, Sister Dorothea was on the day shift and had left the house at six o'clock, and Mrs. Zeidler was still in bed when, shortly after eight, the mail came.

At once I looked it over, found nothing for myself—Maria had written only two days before—but discovered at the very first glance an envelope mailed in town and addressed unmistakably in Dr. Werner's handwriting.

First I put the letter in with the others, addressed to Mr. Münzer and Mrs. Zeidler, went to my room and waited until Mrs. Zeidler had emerged, brought Münzer his letter, gone to the kitchen, then back to the bedroom, and in just ten minutes left the flat, for her work at Mannesmann's began at nine o'clock.

For safety's sake Oskar waited, dressed very slowly, cleaned his fingernails with a show (for his own benefit) of perfect calm, and only then resolved to act. I went to the kitchen, set an aluminum pot half-full of water on the largest of the three gas burners, and turned the flame on full, but reduced it as soon as the water came to a boil. Then, carefully supervising my thoughts, holding them as close as possible to the action in hand, I crossed over to Sister Dorothea's room, took the letter, which Mrs. Zeidler had thrust half under the frosted-glass door, returned to the kitchen, and held the back of the envelope cautiously over the steam until I was able to open it without damage. It goes without saying

that Oskar had turned off the gas before venturing to hold Dr. Werner's letter over the pot.

I did not read the doctor's communication in the kitchen, but lying on my bed. At first I was disappointed, for neither the salutation, "Dear Miss Dorothea," nor the closing formula, "Sincerely yours, Erich Werner," threw any light on the relations between doctor and nurse.

Nor in reading the letter did I find one frankly tender word. Werner expressed his regret at not having spoken to Sister Dorothea the previous day, although he had seen her from the doorway of the Men's Private Pavilion. For reasons unknown to Dr. Werner, Sister Dorothea had turned away when she saw him in conference with Sister Beata—Dorothea's friend, as we all remember. Dr. Werner merely requested an explanation. His conversation with Sister Beata, he begged leave to state, had been of a purely professional nature. Sister Beata was rather impetuous, but as she, Sister Dorothea, knew, he had always done his best to keep her at a distance. This was no easy matter, as she, Dorothea, knowing Beata, must surely realize. There were times when Sister Beata made no attempt to conceal her feelings, which he, Dr. Werner, had never reciprocated. The last sentence of the letter ran: "Please believe me that you are free to drop in on me at any time." Despite the formality and coldness bordering on arrogance of these lines, I had no great difficulty in seeing through Dr. E. Werner's epistolary style and recognizing the note for what it was, a passionate love letter.

Mechanically I put the letter back in its envelope. Forgetting the most elementary measures of hygiene, I moistened the flap, which Werner may well have licked, with Oskar's tongue. Then I burst out laughing. Still laughing, I began to slap my forehead and occiput by turns. It was only after this had been going on for some time that I managed to divert my right hand from Oskar's forehead to the door-knob of my room, opened the door, stepped out into the hallway, and slipped the letter half under Sister Dorothea's door.

I was still crouching with one, maybe two fingers on the letter, when I heard Mr. Münzer's voice from the other end of the hall. He spoke slowly and emphatically as though dictating; I could make out every word: "Would you, kind sir, please bring me some water?"

I stood up. It ran through my mind that the man must be sick, but I realized at once that the man behind the door

was not sick and that Oskar had hit on this idea only to have an excuse for bringing him water. Never would I have set foot in a total stranger's room in response to any ordinary unmotivated call!

At first I was going to bring him the still tepid water that had helped me to open Dr. Werner's letter. But then I poured the used water into the sink, let fresh water gush into the pot, and carried pot and water to the door behind which dwelt the voice that had cried out for me and water, perhaps only for water.

Oskar knocked, entered, and was hit by the smell that is so very characteristic of Klepp. To call this effluvium acrid would be to overlook its density and sweetness. The air surrounding Klepp had, for example, nothing in common with the vinegary scent of Sister Dorothea's room. To say sweet and sour would also be misleading. This Münzer, or Klepp as I call him today, this corpulent, indolent, yet not inactive, superstitious, readily perspiring, unwashed, but not derelict flutist and jazz clarinettist, had, though something or other was always preventing him from dying, and still has, the smell of a corpse that never stops smoking cigarettes, sucking peppermints, and eating garlic. So smelled he even then, and so smells he and breathes he today when, injecting transience and love of life into the atmosphere along with, and I might say enveloped in, his aroma, he descends upon me on visiting days, compelling Bruno to fling open every available door and window the moment Klepp, after elaborate farewells and promises to come again, has left the room.

Today Oskar is bedridden. Then, in the Zeidler flat, I found Klepp in the leftovers of a bed, cheerfully rotting. Within reaching distance of him, I observed an old-fashioned, extremely baroque-looking alcohol lamp, a dozen or more packages of spaghetti, several cans of olive oil, a few tubes of tomato paste, some damp, lumpy salt wrapped in newspaper, and a case of beer which turned out to be lukewarm. Into the empty beer bottles he urinated lying down, then, as he told me confidentially an hour or so later, he recapped the greenish receptacles, which held about as much as he did and for the most part were full to the brim. These, to avoid any misunderstanding born of sudden thirst, he set aside, careful to segregate them from the beer bottles still properly deserving of the name. Although he had running water in his room—with a little spirit of enterprise he might have urinated in the washbasin—he was too lazy, or rather too

busy with himself, to get up, to leave the bed he had taken such pains adjusting to his person, and put fresh water in his spaghetti pot.

Since Klepp, Mr. Münzer I mean, was always careful to cook his spaghetti in the same water and guarded this several times drained-off, increasingly viscous liquid like the apple of his eye, he was often able, aided by his supply of beer bottles, to lie flat on his back for upward of four days at a time. The situation became critical only when his spaghetti water had boiled down to an oversalted, glutinous sludge. On such occasions Klepp might, of course, have let himself starve to death; but in those days he lacked the ideological foundations for that kind of thing, and moreover, his asceticism seemed by its very nature to fall into four- or five-day periods. Otherwise, he might easily have made himself still more independent of the outside world with the help of Mrs. Zeidler, who brought him his mail, or of a larger spaghetti pot.

On the day when Oskar violated the secrecy of the mails, Klepp had been lying independently in bed for five days. The remains of his spaghetti water might have been fine for posting bills. This was his situation when he heard my irresolute step, a step preoccupied with Sister Dorothea and her correspondence, in the corridor. Having observed that Oskar did not react to his mock cough, he threw his voice into the breach on the day when I opened Dr. Werner's coolly passionate love letter, and said: "Would you, kind sir, please bring me some water?"

And I took the pot, poured out the tepid water, turned on the faucet, let the water gush until the little pot was half-full, added a little, and brought him the fresh water. I was the kind sir he had guessed me to be; I introduced myself as Matzerath, stonecutter and maker of inscriptions.

He, equally courteous, raised the upper part of his body a degree or two, identified himself as Egon Münzer, jazz musician, but asked me to call him Klepp, as his father before him had borne the name of Münzer. I understood this request only too well; it was sheer humility that impelled me to keep the name of Matzerath and it was only on rare occasions that I could make up my mind to call myself Oskar Bronski; I preferred to call myself Koljaiczek or just plain Oskar. Consequently I had no difficulty whatever in calling this corpulent and recumbent young man—I gave him thirty but he proved to be younger—just plain Klepp.

avoid. "Ah, my dear sir, won't you please join me in a plate of spaghetti!" There was no help for it. We ate spaghetti prepared in the fresh water I had brought. I should have liked to give his pasty cooking pot a thorough scouring in the kitchen sink, but I was afraid to say a word. Klepp rolled over on one side and silently, with the assured movements of a somnambulist, attended to his cookery. When the spaghetti was done, he drained off the water into a large empty can, then, without noticeably altering the position of his body, reached under the bed and produced a plate incrustated with grease and tomato paste. After what seemed like a moment's hesitation, he reached again under the bed, fished out a wad of newspaper, wiped the plate with it, and tossed the paper back under the bed. He breathed on the smudged plate as though to blow away a last grain of dust, and finally, with a gesture of noblesse oblige, handed me the most loathsome dish I have ever seen and invited Oskar to help himself.

After you, I said. But nothing doing, he was the perfect host. After providing me with a fork and spoon so greasy they stuck to my fingers, he piled an immense portion of spaghetti on my plate; upon it, with another of his noble gestures, he squeezed a long worm of tomato paste, to which, by deft movements of the tube, he succeeded in lending an ornamental line; finally he poured on a plentiful portion of oil from the can. He himself ate out of the pot. He served himself oil and tomato paste, sprinkled pepper on both helpings, mixed up his share, and motioned me to do likewise. "Ah, dear sir," he said when all was in readiness, "forgive me for having no grated parmesan. Nevertheless, I wish you the best of appetites."

To this day Oskar is at a loss to say how he summoned up the courage to ply his fork and spoon. Strange to say, I enjoyed that spaghetti. In fact, Klepp's spaghetti became for me a culinary ideal, by which from that day on I have measured every menu that is set before me.

In the course of our repast, I managed to take a good look round the bedridden gentleman's room—but without attracting his attention. The main attraction was an open chimney hole, just under the ceiling, through which a black breath invaded the room. There were two windows, and it was windy out. Apparently it was the gusts of wind that sent clouds of soot puffing intermittently from the chimney hole into the room, where the soot settled evenly on the furniture. Since the furniture consisted solely of the bed in the mid-

dle of the room and several rolled carpets covered with wrapping paper, it was safe to say that nothing in the room was more blackened than the once-white bed sheet, the pillow slip under Klepp's head, and a towel with which Klepp always covered his face when a gust of wind wafted a soot cloud into the room.

Both windows, like those of the Zeidler living room, looked out on Jülicher-Strasse, or, more precisely, on the green leaves of the chestnut tree that stood in front of the house. The only picture in the room was a color photo of Elizabeth of England, probably cut out of an illustrated weekly. Under the picture bagpipes hung on a hook, the plaid pattern still recognizable beneath the pervading blackness. While I contemplated the colored photo, thinking less of Elizabeth and her Philip than of Sister Dorothea, torn, poor thing, perhaps desperately, between Oskar and Dr. Werner, Klepp informed me that he was a loyal and enthusiastic supporter of the British Royal Family and had consequently taken bagpipe lessons from the pipers of a Scottish regiment in the British Army of Occupation; Elizabeth, it so happened, was colonel of said regiment, which was all the more reason for him to take these particular pipers for his bagpipe teachers; Klepp had seen her in newsreels, wearing a kilt as she reviewed the regiment.

Here, strange to say, the Catholic in me began to stir. I said I doubted whether Elizabeth knew a thing about bagpipe music, tossed in a word or two about the cruel and unjust execution of the Catholic Mary Stuart, and, in short, gave Klepp to understand that in my opinion Elizabeth was tone-deaf.

I had been expecting an outburst of rage on the royalist's part. But he smiled like one graced with superior knowledge and asked me for an explanation: had I any grounds for setting myself up as an authority on music?

For a long while Oskar gazed at Klepp. Unwittingly, he had touched off a spark within me, and from my head that spark leapt to my hump. It was as though all my old, battered, exhausted drums had decided to celebrate a Last Judgment of their own. The thousand drums I had thrown on the scrap heap and the one drum that lay buried in Saspe Cemetery were resurrected, arose again, sound of limb; their resonance filled my whole being. I leapt up from the bed, asked Klepp to excuse me for just one moment, and rushed out of the room, Passing Sister Dorothea's frosted-glass door

—half the letter still protruded—I ran to my own room, where I was met by the drum which Raskolnikov had given me while he was painting his "Madonna 49." I seized the drum and the two drumsticks, I turned or was turned, left the room, rushed past the forbidden room, and entered Klepp's spaghetti kitchen as a traveler returns from long wanderings. I sat on the edge of the bed and, without waiting to be asked, put my red and white lacquered cylinder into position. Feeling a little awkward at first, I toyed for a moment with the sticks, made little movements in the air. Then, looking past the astonished Klepp, I let one stick fall on the drum as though at random, and ah, the drum responded to Oskar, and Oskar brought the second stick into play. I began to drum, relating everything in order: in the beginning was the beginning. The moth between the light bulbs drummed in the hour of my birth; I drummed the cellar stairs with their sixteen steps and my fall from those same stairs during the celebration of my legendary third birthday; I drummed the schedule at the Pestalozzi School, I climbed the Stockturm with my drum, sat with it beneath political rostrums, drummed eels and gulls, and carpet-beating on Good Friday. Drumming, I sat on the coffin, tapered at the foot end, of my poor mama; I drummed the saga of Herbert Truczinski's scarry back. As I was drumming out the defense of the Polish Post Office, I noted a movement far away, at the head end of the bed I was sitting on: with half an eye, I saw Klepp sitting up, taking a preposterous wooden flute from under his pillow, setting it to his lips, and bringing forth sounds that were so sweet and unnatural, perfectly attuned to my drumming that I was able to lead Klepp to the cemetery in Saspe and, after Leo Schugger had finished his dance, Klepp helped me to make the fizz powder of my first love foam up for him; I even led Klepp into the jungles of Mrs. Lina Greff; I made Greff's drumming machine with its 165-pound counterweight play its grand finale and run down; I welcomed Klepp to Bebra's Theater at the Front, made Jesus speak, and drummed Störtebeker and his fellow Dusters off the diving tower—and down below sat Lucy. I let ants and Russians take possession of my drum, but I did not guide Klepp back to the cemetery in Saspe, where I threw my drum into the grave after Matzerath, but struck up my main, never-ending theme: Kashubian potato fields in the October rain, there sits my grandmother in her four skirts; and Oskar's heart nearly turned to stone when I

heard the October rain trickling from Klepp's flute, when, beneath the rain and the four skirts, Klepp's flute discovered Joseph Koljaiczek the firebug and celebrated, nay represented, the begetting of my poor mama.

We played for several hours. After a number of variations on my grandfather's flight over the timber rafts, we concluded our concert, happy though exhausted, with a hymn, a song of hope, suggesting that perhaps the vanished arsonist had been miraculously saved.

Before the last tone had quite left his flute, Klepp jumped up from his warm, deep-furrowed bed. Cadaverous smells followed him, but he tore the windows open, stuffed newspaper in the chimney hole, tore the picture of Elizabeth of England to tatters, announced that the royalist era was ended, ran water into the washbasin and washed himself: yes, Klepp washed, there was nothing he feared to wash away. This was no mere washing, it was a purification. And when the purified one turned away from the water and stood before me in his dripping, naked corpulence, his ungainly member hanging down at a slant, and, bursting with vigor, lifted me, lifted me high in the air—for Oskar was and still is a lightweight—when laughter burst out of him and dashed against the ceiling, I understood that Oskar's drum had not been alone in rising from the dead, for Klepp too was as one resurrected. And so we congratulated one another and kissed each other on the cheeks.

That same day—we went out toward evening, drank beer and ate blood sausage with onions—Klepp suggested that we start a jazz band together. I asked for time to think it over, but Oskar had already made up his mind to give up his modeling and stonecutting activities and become percussion man in a jazz band.

On the Fiber Bug

THERE CAN BE no doubt that on the day just recorded Oskar supplied Klepp with grounds for getting out of bed. He leapt overjoyed from his musty bedclothes; he allowed water to touch him, he was a new man, the kind that says "Terrific" and "The world is my oyster." And yet today, now that it is Oskar who is privileged to lie in bed, here is what I think: Klepp is trying to get even with me, he is trying to throw me out of my bed in this mental hospital, because I made him forsake his bed in the spaghetti kitchen.

Once a week I have to put up with his visits, listen to his tirades about jazz and his musico-Communist manifestoes, for no sooner had I deprived him of his bed and his Elizabeth-of-the-bagpipes than he, who as long as he lay in bed was a royalist, devoted heart and soul to the English royal family, became a dues-paying member of the Communist Party, and Communism has been his illegal hobby ever since: drinking beer, devouring blood sausage, he holds forth to the harmless little men who stand at bars, studying the labels on bottles, about the benefits of collective endeavour, of a jazz band working full time, or a Soviet kolkhoz.

In these times of ours, there isn't very much an awakened dreamer can do. Once alienated from his sheltering bed, Klepp had the possibility of becoming a comrade, and illegally at that, which added to the charm. Jazz was the second religion available to him. Thirdly Klepp, born a Protestant, could have been converted to Catholicism.

You've got to hand it to Klepp: he left the roads to all religions open. Caution, his heavy, glistening flesh, and a sense of humor that lives on applause, enabled him to devise a sly system, combining the teachings of Marx with the myth of jazz. If one day a left-wing priest of the worker-priest type should cross his path, especially if this priest should happen to have a collection of Dixieland records, you will see a Marxist jazz fan starting to take the sacraments on Sunday and mingling his above-mentioned body odor with the scent of a Neo-Gothic Cathedral.

Between me and such a fate stands my bed, from which Klepp tries to lure me with throbbing, life-loving promises. He sends petition after petition to the court and works hand in glove with my lawyer in demanding a new trial: he wants Oskar to be acquitted, set free—he wants them to turn me out of my hospital—and why? Just because he envies me my bed.

Even so, I have no regret that while rooming at Zeidler's I transformed a recumbent friend into a standing, stamping, and occasionally even running friend. Apart from the strenuously thoughtful hours that I devoted to Sister Dorothea, I now had a carefree private life. "Hey, Klepp," I would cry, slapping him on the shoulder, "what about that jazz band?" And he would fondle my hump, which he loved almost as much as his belly. "Oskar and me," he announced to the world, "we're going to start a jazz-band. All we need is a good guitarist who can handle the banjo maybe if he has to."

He was right. Drum and flute would not have been enough. A second melodic instrument was needed. A plucked bass wouldn't have been bad, and visually there was certainly something to be said for it, but even then bass players were hard to come by. So we searched frantically for a guitarist. We went to the movies a good deal, had our pictures taken twice a week as you may remember, and over beer, blood sausage, and onions, did all sorts of silly tricks with our passport photos. It was then that Klepp met his redheaded Ilse, thoughtlessly gave her a picture of himself, and just for that had to marry her. But we didn't find a guitarist.

In the course of my life as a model, I had gained some knowledge of the Old City of Düsseldorf, with its bull's-eye windowpanes, its mustard and cheese, its beer fumes and Lower Rhenish coziness, but it was only with Klepp that I became really familiar with it. We looked for a guitarist all around St. Lambert's Church, in all the bars, and most particularly in Rättinger-Strasse, at the Unicorn, because Bobby, who led the dance band, would sometimes let us join in with our flute and toy drum and was enthusiastic about my drumming, though he himself, despite the finger that was missing from his right hand, was no slouch as a percussion man.

We found no guitarist at the Unicorn, but I got a certain amount of practice. What with my wartime theatrical experience, I would have gotten back into the swing of it very

quickly if not for Sister Dorothea, who occasionally made me miss my cue.

Half my thoughts were still with her. That would have been all right if the rest had remained entirely on my drum. But as it worked out, my thoughts would start with my drum and end up with Sister Dorothea's Red Cross pin. Klepp was brilliant at bridging over my lapses with his flute; but it worried him to see Oskar so half-immersed in his thoughts. "Are you hungry? I'll order some sausage."

Behind all the sorrows of this world Klepp saw a ravenous hunger; all human suffering, he believed, could be cured by a portion of blood sausage. What quantities of fresh blood sausage with rings of onion, washed down with beer, Oskar consumed in order to make his friend Klepp think his sorrow's name was hunger and not Sister Dorothea.

Usually we left the Zeidler flat early in the morning and took our breakfast in the Old City. I no longer went to the Academy except when we needed money for the movies. The Muse Ulla, who had meanwhile become engaged for the third or fourth time to Lankes, was unavailable, because Lankes was getting his first big industrial commissions. But Oskar didn't like to pose without Ulla, for when I posed alone, they would always distort me horribly and paint me in the blackest colors. And so I gave myself up entirely to my friend Klepp. I could still go to see Maria and little Kurt, but their apartment offered me no peace. Mr. Stenzel, her boss and married lover, was always there.

One day in the early fall of '49, Klepp and I left our rooms and converged in the hallway, not far from the frosted-glass door. We were about to leave the flat with our instruments when Zeidler opened the door of his living room by a crack and called out to us.

He was pushing a bulky roll of narrow carpeting and wanted us to help him lay it—a coconut-fiber runner it proved to be—in the hallway. The runner measured twenty-eight feet, but the hallway came to just twenty-five feet and seven inches; Klepp and I had to cut off the rest. This we did sitting down, for the cutting of coconut fiber proved to be hard work. When we were through, the runner was almost an inch too short, though the width was just right. Next Zeidler, who said he had trouble bending down, asked us to do the tacking. Oskar hit on the idea of stretching the runner as we tacked, and we managed to make up the gap, or very close to it. We used tacks with large, flat heads; small heads

moment he let the hammer drop. But once he had passed the frosted-glass door, he and his hammer felt better.

All things come to an end, and so did that fiber runner. The broad-headed tacks ran from end to end, up to their necks in the floorboards, holding just their heads above the surging, swirling coconut fibers. Well pleased with ourselves, we strode up and down the hallway, enjoying the length of the carpet, complimented ourselves on our work, and intimated just in passing that it was not so easy to lay a carpet before breakfast, on an empty stomach. At last we achieved our end: Mrs. Zeidler ventured out on the brand-new, virgin runner and found her way over it to the kitchen, where she poured out coffee and fried some eggs. We ate in my room; Mrs. Zeidler toddled off, it was time for her to go to the office at Mannesmann's. We left the door open, chewed, savored our fatigue, and contemplated our work, the fiber runner running fibrously toward us.

Why so many words about a cheap carpet which might at most have had a certain barter value before the currency reform? The question is justified. Oskar anticipates it and replies: it was on this fiber runner that Oskar, in the ensuing night, met Sister Dorothea for the first time.

It must have been close to midnight when I came home full of beer and blood sausage. I had left Klepp in the Old City, still looking for the guitarist. I found the keyhole of the Zeidler flat, found the fiber runner in the hallway, found my way past the dark frosted glass to my room, and, having taken my clothes off, found my bed. I did not find my pajamas, they were at Maria's in the wash; instead I found the extra piece of fiber runner we had cut off, laid it down beside my bed, got into bed, but found no sleep.

There is no reason to tell you everything that Oskar thought or revolved unthinking in his head because he could not sleep. Today I believe I have discovered the reason for my insomnia. Before climbing into bed, I had stood barefoot on my new bedside rug, the remnant from the runner. The coconut fibers pierced my bare skin and crept into my bloodstream: long after I had lain down, I was still standing on coconut fibers, and that is why I was unable to sleep; for nothing is more stimulating, more sleep-dispelling, more thought-provoking than standing barefoot on a coconut-fiber mat.

Long after midnight Oskar was still standing on the mat and lying in bed both at once; toward three in the morning

he heard a door and another door. That, I thought, must be Klepp coming home without a guitarist but full of blood sausage; yet I knew it was not Klepp who opened first one door and then another. In addition, I thought, as long as you are lying in bed for nothing, with coconut fibers cutting into the soles of your feet, you might as well get out of bed and really, not just in your imagination, stand on the fiber mat beside your bed. Oskar did just this. There were consequences. The moment I set foot on the mat, it reminded me, via the soles of my feet, of its origin and source, the twenty-five-foot-six-inch runner in the hallway. Was it because I felt sorry for the cut-off remnant? Was it because I had heard the doors in the hallway and presumed, without believing, that it was Klepp? In any event, Oskar, who in going to bed had failed to find his pajamas, bent down, picked up one corner of the mat in each hand, moved his legs aside until he was no longer standing on the mat but on the floor, pulled up the thirty-inch mat between his legs and in front of his body, which, as we recall, measured four feet one. His nakedness was decently covered, but from knees to collarbone he was exposed to the influence of the coconut fiber. And that influence was further enhanced when behind his fibrous shield he left his dark room for the dark corridor and set his feet on the runner.

Is it any wonder if I took hurried little steps in order to escape the fibrous influence beneath my feet, if, in my search for salvation and safety, I made for the one place where there was no coconut fiber on the floor—the toilet?

This recess was as dark as the hallway or Oskar's room but was occupied nonetheless, as a muffled feminine scream made clear to me. My fiber pelt collided with the knees of a seated human. When I made no move to leave the toilet—for behind me threatened the coconut fibers—the seated human tried to expel me. "Who are you? what do you want? go away!" said a voice that could not possibly belong to Mrs. Zeidler. There was a certain plaintiveness in that "Who are you?"

"Well, well, Sister Dorothea, just guess." I ventured a little banter which, I hoped, would distract her from the slightly embarrassing circumstances of our meeting. But she wasn't in the mood for guessing; she stood up, reached out for me in the darkness and tried to push me out onto the runner, but she reached too high, into the void over my head. She tried lower down, but this time it wasn't I but my fibrous

apron, my coconut pelt that she caught hold of. Again she let out a scream—oh, why do women always have to scream? Sister Dorothea seemed to have mistaken me for somebody, for she began to tremble and whispered: "Oh, heavens, it's the Devil!" I couldn't repress a slight giggle, but it wasn't meant maliciously. She, however, took it as the Devil's sniggering. That word Devil was not to my liking and when she again, but now in a very cowed tone, asked: "Who are you?" Oskar replied: "I am Satan, come to call on Sister Dorothea!" And she: "Oh, heavens, what for?"

Slowly I felt my way into my role, and Satan was my prompter. "Because Satan is in love with Sister Dorothea!" "No, no, no, I won't have it," she cried. She tried again to escape, but once again encountered the Satanic fibers of my coconut pelt—her nightgown must have been very thin. Her ten fingers also encountered the jungle of seduction, and suddenly she felt faint. She fell forward; I caught her in my pelt, managed to hold her up long enough to arrive at a decision in keeping with my Satanic role. Gently giving way, I let her down on her knees, taking care that they should not touch the cold tiles of the toilet but come to rest on the fiber rug in the hallway. Then I let her slip down backward on the carpet, her head pointing westward in the direction of Klepp's room. The whole dorsal length of her—she must have measured at least five feet four—was in contact with the runner; I covered her over with the same fibrous stuff, but I had only thirty inches available. First I put the top end under her chin, but then the lower edge came down too far over her thighs. I had to move the mat up a couple of inches; now it covered her mouth, but her nose was still free, she could still breathe. She did more than breathe; she heaved and panted as Oskar lay down on his erstwhile mat, setting all its thousand fibers in vibration, for instead of seeking direct contact with Sister Dorothea, he relied on the effects of the coconut fiber. Again he tried to strike up a conversation, but Sister Dorothea was still in a half-faint. She could only gasp "Heavens, heavens!" and ask Oskar over and over who he was and where he was from. There was shuddering and trembling between fiber runner and fiber mat when I said I was Satan, pronounced the name with a Satanic hiss, gave hell as my address, and described it with a picturesque touch or two. I thrashed about vigorously on my bedside mat to keep it in motion, for my ears told me plainly that the fibers gave Sister Dorothea a sensation similar to that

violence. I hardly noticed it when she wriggled out from under me and the mat, when she slipped away from me and I slipped to the floor. The carpet absorbed the sound of her steps. I heard a door opening and closing, a key turning; then the six squares of the frosted-glass door took on light and reality from within.

Oskar lay there and covered himself with the mat, which still had a little Satanic warmth in it. My eyes were fixed on the illumined squares. From time to time a shadow darted across the frosted glass. Now she is going to the clothes cupboard, I said to myself, and now to the washstand. Oskar attempted a last diabolical venture. Taking my mat with me I crawled over the runner to the door, scratched on the wood, raised myself a little, sent a searching, pleading hand over the two lower panes. Sister Dorothea did not open; she kept moving busily between cupboard and washstand. I knew the truth and admitted as much: Sister Dorothea was packing, preparing to take flight, to take flight from me.

Even the feeble hope that in leaving the room she would show me her electrically illumined face was to be disappointed. First the light went out behind the frosted glass, then I heard the key, the door opened, shoes on the fiber runner—I reached out for her, struck a suitcase, a stockinged leg. She kicked me in the chest with one of those sensible hiking shoes I had seen in the clothes cupboard, and when Oskar pleaded a last time: "Sister Dorothea," the apartment door slammed: a woman had left me.

You and all those who understand my grief will say now: Go to bed, Oskar. What business have you in the hallway after this humiliating episode? It is four in the morning. You are lying naked on a fiber rug, with no cover but a small and scraggly mat. You've scraped the skin off your hands and knees. Your heart bleeds, your member aches, your shame cries out to high heaven. You have waked Mr. Zeidler. He has waked his wife. In another minute they'll get up, open the door of their bed-living room, and see you. Go to bed, Oskar, it will soon strike five.

This was exactly the advice I gave myself as I lay on the fiber runner. But I just shivered and lay still. I tried to call back Sister Dorothea's body. I could feel nothing but coconut fibers, they were everywhere, even between my teeth. Then a band of light fell on Oskar: the door of the Zeidler bed-living room opened a crack. Zeidler's hedgehog-head, above

it a head full of metal curlers, Mrs. Zeidler. They stared, he coughed, she giggled, he called me, I gave no reply, she went on giggling, he told her to be still, she asked what was wrong with me, he said this won't do, she said it was a respectable house, he threatened to put me out, but I was silent, for the measure was not yet full. The Zeidlers opened the door, he switched on the light in the hall. They came toward me, making malignant little eyes; he had a good rage up, and it wasn't on any liqueur glasses that he was going to vent it this time. He stood over me, and Oskar awaited the Hedgehog's fury. But Zeidler never did get that tantrum off his chest. A hubbub was heard in the stair well, an uncertain key groped for, and at last found, the keyhole, and Klepp came in, bringing with him someone who was just as drunk as he: Scholle, the long-sought guitarist.

The two of them pacified Zeidler and wife, bent down over Oskar, asked no questions, picked me up, and carried me, me and my Satanie mat, to my room.

Klepp rubbed me warm. The guitarist picked up my clothes. Together they dressed me and dried my tears. Sobs. Daybreak outside the window. Sparrows. Klepp hung my drum round my neck and showed his little wooden flute. Sobs. The guitarist picked up his guitar. Sparrows. Friends surrounded me, took me between them, led the sobbing but unresisting Oskar out of the flat, out of the house in Jülicher-Strasse, toward the sparrows, led him away from the influence of coconut fiber, led me through dawning streets, through the Hofgarten to the planetarium and the banks of the river Rhine, whose grey waters rolled down to Holland, carrying barges with flowing clotheslines.

From six to nine that misty September morning, Klepp the flutist, Scholle the guitarist, and Oskar the percussion man sat on the right bank of the river Rhine. We made music, played ourselves into the groove, drank out of one bottle, peered across at the poplars on the opposite bank, and regaled the steamers that were bucking the current after taking on coal in Duisburg, with hot jazz and sad Mississippi music. Meanwhile we wondered about a name for the jazz band we had just founded.

When a bit of sun colored the morning mist and a craving for breakfast crept into our music, Oskar, who had put his drum between himself and the preceding night, arose, took

some money from his coat pocket, by which he meant and they understood breakfast, and announced to his friends the name of the newborn band: We agreed to call ourselves "The Rhine River Three" and went to breakfast.

In the Onion Cellar

WE LOVED THE Rhine meadows, and it so happened that Ferdinand Schmuu, the restaurant and night-spot owner, also loved the right bank of the Rhine between Düsseldorf and Kaiserswerth. We did most of our practicing above Stockum. Meanwhile Schmuu, carrying a small-caliber rifle, searched the riverside hedges and bushes for sparrows. That was his hobby, his recreation. When business got on his nerves, Schmuu bade his wife take the wheel of the Mercedes; they would drive along the river and park above Stockum. Slightly flat-footed, his rifle pointing at the ground, he set off across the meadows, followed by his wife, who would rather have stayed in the car. At the end of their cross-country jaunt, he deposited her on a comfortable stone by the riverbank and vanished amid the hedges. While we played our ragtime, he went pop pop in the bushes. While we made music, Schmuu shot sparrows.

When Scholle, who like Klepp knew every bar owner in town, heard shooting in the shrubbery, he announced:

"Schmuu is shooting sparrows."

Since Schmuu is no longer living, I may as well put in my obituary right here: Schmuu was a good marksman and perhaps a good man as well; for when Schmuu went sparrow-shooting, he kept ammunition in the left-hand pocket of his coat, but his right-hand pocket was full of bird food, which he distributed among the sparrows with a generous sweeping movement, not before, but after he had done his shooting, and he never shot more than twelve birds in an afternoon.

One cool November morning in 1949, when Schmuu was still among the living and we for our part had been practicing for some weeks on the banks of the Rhine, he addressed us in a voice too loud and angry to be taken quite seriously. "How do you expect me to shoot birds when you are messing away with your music?"

"Oh," Klepp apologized, holding out his fist in the old presenting arms. "You must be the gentleman with the right

sense of rhythm, whose shooting keeps such perfect time with our melodies. My respects, Mr. Schmuu!"

Schmuu was pleased that Klepp knew him by name, but inquired how so. Klepp, with a show of indignation: Why, everybody knows Schmuu. In the street I can always hear somebody saying: There's Schmuu, there goes Schmuu, did you see Schmuu just now, where is Schmuu today, Schmuu is out shooting sparrows.

Thus transformed into a public figure, Schmuu offered us cigarettes, asked us our names, and requested a piece from our repertory. We obliged with a tiger rag, whereupon he called his wife, who had been sitting in her fur coat on a stone, musing over the waters of the Rhine. Fur-coated, she joined us and again we played; this time it was "High Society", and when we had finished, she said in her fur coat: "Why, Ferdy, that's just what you need for the Cellar." He seemed to be on the same opinion; indeed, he was under the impression that he personally had gone scouting for us and found us. Nevertheless, Schmuu, pondering, maybe calculating, sent several flat stones skipping over the waters of the Rhine before he made his offer: would we play at the Onion Cellar from nine to two, for ten marks an evening apiece, well, let's say twelve? Klepp said seventeen in order that Schmuu might say fifteen; Schmuu said fourteen fifty, and we called it a deal.

Seen from the street, the Onion Cellar looked like many of the newer night clubs which are distinguished from the older bars and cabarets by, among other things, their higher prices. The higher prices were justified by the outlandish decoration of these night spots, many of which termed themselves "Artists' clubs" and also by their names. There was "The Ravioli Room" (discreet and refined), "The Taboo" (mysterious and existentialist), "The Paprika" (spicy and high-spirited). And of course there was "The Onion Cellar".

The words "Onion Cellar" and a poignantly naïve likeness of an onion had been painted with deliberate awkwardness on an enamel sign which hung in the old German manner from elaborate wrought-iron gallows in front of the house. The one and only window was glassed with bottle-green bull's-eye panes. The iron door, painted with red lead, had no doubt seen service outside an air-raid shelter in the war years. Outside it stood the doorman in a rustic sheepskin. Not everyone was allowed in the Onion Cellar. Especially on Fridays, when wages turn to beer, it was the doorman's busi-

ness to turn away certain Old City characters, for whom the Onion Cellar was too expensive in the first place. Behind the red-lead door, those who were allowed in found five concrete steps. You went down, found yourself on a landing some three feet square, to which a poster for a Picasso show lent an original, artistic turn. Four more steps took you to the checkroom. "Please pay later," said a little cardboard sign, and indeed, the young man at the counter, usually an art student with a beard, refused to take money in advance, because the Onion Cellar was not only expensive but also and nevertheless high class.

The owner in person welcomed every single guest with elaborate gestures and mobile, expressive eyebrows, as though initiating him into a secret rite. As we know, the owner's name was Ferdinand Schmuß; he was a man who shot sparrows now and then, and had a keen eye for the society which had sprung up in Düsseldorf (and elsewhere, though not quite so quickly) since the currency reform.

The Onion Cellar—and here we see the note of authenticity essential to a successful night club—was a real cellar; in fact, it was quite damp and chilly under foot. Tubular in shape, it measured roughly thirteen by sixty, and was heated by two authentic cast-iron stoves. Yet in one respect the Cellar wasn't a cellar after all. The ceiling had been taken off, so that the club actually included the former ground-floor apartment. The one and only window was not a real cellar window, but the former window of the ground-floor apartment. However, since one might have looked out of the window if not for its opaque bull's-eye panes; since there was a gallery that one reached by a highly original and highly precipitous staircase, the Onion Cellar can reasonably be termed "authentic", even if it was not a real cellar—and besides, why should it have been?

Oskar has forgotten to tell you that the staircase leading to the gallery was not a real staircase but more like a companionway, because on either side of its dangerously steep steps there were two extremely original clotheslines to hold on to; the staircase swayed a bit, making you think of an ocean voyage and adding to the price.

The Onion Cellar was lighted by acetylene lamps such as miners carry, which broadcast a smell of carbide—again adding to the price—and transported the customer unto the gallery of a mine, a potash mine for instance, three thousand feet below the surface of the earth: cutters bare to the waist

hack away at the rock, opening up a vein; the scraper hauls out the salt, the windlass roars as it fills the cars; far behind, where the gallery turns off to Friedrichshall Two, a swaying light; that's the head foreman and here he comes with a cheery hello, swinging a carbide lamp that looks exactly like the carbide lamps that hung from the unadorned, slapdashly whitewashed walls of the Onion Cellar, casting their light and smell, adding to the prices, and creating an original atmosphere.

The customers were uncomfortably seated on common crates covered with onion sacks, yet the plank tables, scrubbed and spotless, recalled the guests from the mine to a peaceful peasant inn such as we sometimes see in the movies.

That was all! But what about the bar? No bar. Waiter, the menu please! Neither waiter nor menu. In fact, there was no one else but ourselves, the Rhine River Three. Klepp, Scholle, and Oskar sat beneath the staircase that was really a companionway. We arrived at nine, unpacked our instruments, and began to play at about ten. But for the present it is only a quarter past nine and I won't be able to speak about us until later. Right now let us keep an eye on Schmuh, who occasionally shot sparrows with a small-caliber rifle.

As soon as the Onion Cellar had filled up—half-full was regarded as full—Schmuh, the host, donned his shawl. This shawl had been specially made for him. It was cobalt-blue silk, printed with a golden-yellow pattern. I mention all this because the donning of the shawl was significant. The pattern printed on the shawl was made up of golden-yellow onions. The Onion Cellar was not really "open" until Schmuh put on his shawl.

The customers—businessmen, doctors, lawyers, artists, journalists, theater and movie people, well-known figures from the sporting world, officials in the provincial and municipal government, in short, a cross section of the world which nowadays calls itself intellectual—came with wives, mistresses, secretaries, interior decorators, and occasional male mistresses, to sit on crates covered with burlap. Until Schmuh put on his golden-yellow onions, the conversation was subdued, forced, dispirited. These people wanted to talk, to unburden themselves, but they couldn't seem to get started; despite all their efforts, they left the essential unsaid, talked around it. Yet how eager they were to spill their guts, to talk from their hearts, their bowels, their entrails, to forget about their brains just this once, to lay

napkin, very much in the manner of a magician: beneath it lay still another napkin, upon which, almost unrecognizable at first glance, lay the paring knives.

These too he proceeded to hand out. But this time he made his rounds more quickly, whipping up the tension that permitted him to raise his prices; he paid no more compliments, and left no time for any exchanges of knives; a calculated haste entered into his movements. "On your mark, get set," he shouted. At "Go" he tore the napkin off the basket, reached into the basket, and handed out, dispensed, distributed among the multitude . . . onions—onions such as were represented, golden-yellow and slightly stylized, on his shawl, plain ordinary onions, not tulip bulbs, but onions such as women buy in the market, such as the vegetable woman sells, such as the peasant, the peasant's wife, or the hired girl plants and harvests, onions such as may be seen, more or less faithfully portrayed in the still lifes of the lesser Dutch masters. Such onions, then, Schmuß dispensed among his guests until each had an onion and no sound could be heard but the purring of the stoves and the whistling of the carbide lamps. For the grand distribution of onions was followed by silence. Into which Ferdinand Schmuß cried: "Ladies and gentlemen, help yourselves." And he tossed one end of his shawl over his left shoulder like a skier just before the start. This was the signal.

The guests peeled the onions. Onions are said to have seven skins. The ladies and gentlemen peeled the onions with the paring knives. They removed the first, third, blond, golden-yellow, rust-brown, or better still, onion-colored skin, they peeled until the onion became glassy, green, whitish, damp, and watery-sticky, until it smelled, smelled like an onion. Then they cut it as one cuts onions, deftly or clumsily, on the little chopping boards shaped like pigs or fish; they cut in one direction and another until the juice spurted or turned to vapor—the older gentlemen were not very handy with paring knives and had to be careful not to cut their fingers; some cut themselves even so, but didn't notice it—the ladies were more skillful, not all of them, but those at least who were housewives at home, who knew how one cuts up onions for hash-brown potatoes, or for liver with apples and onion rings; but in Schmuß's onion cellar there was neither, there was nothing whatever to eat, and anyone who wanted to eat had to go elsewhere, to the "Fischl",

we loved each other at first sight. I couldn't walk either, so he offered me his arm, escorted, or rather carried, me home and from that day on he took loving care of the toenail which had turned black and blue under his heel. He loved me not just my toe, until the toenail came loose from its toe—the right big toe—and there was nothing to prevent a new toenail from growing in. The day the dead toenail fell, his love began to cool. Both of us were miserable about it. I was then that Willy—he still cared for me in a way and besides, we had so much in common—had his terrible idea. Let me, he pleaded, trample your left big toe until the nail turns a light, then a darker purple. I consented and he trampled. Again he loved me with his whole being, and his love endured until my big toenail, the left one it was, fell away like a withered leaf; and then it was autumn again for our love. Willy wanted to start in again on my right big toe, the nail had meanwhile grown in again. But I wouldn't let him. If your love for me is really so overpowering, I said, it ought to outlast a toenail. He couldn't seem to understand. He left me. Months later, we met at a concert. The seat beside me happened to be unoccupied and after the intermission he sat down in it. They were doing the *Ninth Symphony*. When the chorus started up, I removed the shoe from my right foot and held the foot out in front of him. He stepped on it with might and main, but I didn't do anything to interfere with the concert. Seven weeks later Willy left me again. We had two more brief reprieves; twice more I held out my toe, first the left one, then the right one. Today both my toes are maimed. The nails won't grow in again. From time to time Willy comes to see me; shaken, full of pity for me and for himself, he sits at my feet on the rug and stares, unloving and unweeping, at the two nailless victims of our love. Sometimes I say: Come along Willy, let's go to Schmuhs's Onion Cellar and have a good cry. But so far he has refused to come. What the poor soul must suffer without the consolation of tears!

Later—this Oskar relates only to satisfy the curious among you—Mr. Vollmer (he sold radios, I might mention in passing) did come to our Cellar. They cried together and it seems, as Klepp told me yesterday in visiting hour, that they have just been married.

It was from Tuesday to Saturday—the Onion Cellar was closed on Sunday—that the onion brought the more basic tragedies of human existence welling to the surface. But

other every day. They spoke of this and that, and shared a good part of their thoughts, but never alluded to the beard that was missing or the beard that was all too present. Gerhard was considerate of Gudrun; knowing that her skin was sensitive, he never kissed her. Their love remained chaste, though neither of them set much store by chastity, for she was interested in chemistry while he was studying medicine. When a friend suggested the Onion Cellar, they smiled contemptuously with the skepticism characteristic of chemists and medical men. But finally they went, for purposes of documentation, as they assured each other. Never has Oskar seen young people cry so. They came time and time again; they went without food to save up the six marks forty it cost them, and wept about the beard that was absent and the beard that devastated the soft, maidenly skin. Sometimes they tried to stay away from the Onion Cellar. One Monday they didn't come, but the following Monday they were back again. Rubbing the chopped onion between their fingers, they admitted that they had tried to save the six marks forty; they had tried doing it by themselves in her room with a cheap onion, but it wasn't the same. You needed an audience. It was so much easier to cry in company. It gave you a real sense of brotherhood in sorrow when to the right and left of you and in the gallery overhead your fellow students were all crying their hearts out.

This was another case in which the Onion Cellar bestowed not only tears but also, little by little, a cure. Apparently the tears washed away their inhibitions and brought them, as the saying goes, closer together. He kissed her tortured cheeks, she fondled his smooth chin, and one day they stopped coming to the Onion Cellar; they didn't need it any more. Oskar met them months later in Königs-Allee. He didn't recognize them at first. He, the glabrous Gerhard, sported a waving, reddish-blond beard; she, the prickly Gudrun, had barely a slight dark fuzz on her upper lip, very becoming to her. Her chin and cheeks were smooth, radiant, free from vegetation. Still studying but happily married, a student couple. Oskar can hear them in fifty years talking to their grandchildren. She, Gudrun: "That was long ago, before Grandpa had his beard." And he, Gerhard: "That was in the days when your Grandma was having trouble with her beard and we went to the Onion Cellar every Monday."

But to what purpose, you may ask, are three musicians

THE TIN DRUM

ill sitting under the companionway or staircase? What use had the onion shop, what with all this weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, for a regular, and regularly paid, band?

Once the customers had finished crying and unburdening themselves, we took up our instruments and provided a musical transition to normal, everyday conversation. We made it easy for the guests to leave the Onion Cellar and make room for more guests. Klepp, Scholle, and Oskar were not personally lovers of onions. Besides, there was a clause in our contract forbidding us to "use" onions in the same way as the guests. We had no need of them anyway. Scholle, the guitarist, had no ground for sorrow, he always seemed happy and contented, even when two strings on his banjo snapped at once in the middle of a rag. As to Klepp, the very concepts of crying and laughing are to this day unclear to him. Tears make him laugh; I have never seen anyone laugh as hard as Klepp did at the funeral of the aunt who used to wash his shirts and socks before he got married. But what of Oskar? Oskar had plenty of ground for tears. Mightn't he have used a few tears to wash away Sister Dorothea and that long, futile night spent on a still longer coconut-fiber runner? And my Maria? There is no doubt that she gave me cause enough for grief. Didn't Stenzel, her boss, come and go as he pleased in the flat in Bilk? Hadn't Kurt, my son, taken to calling the grocery-store-owner first "Uncle Stenzel" and then "Papa Stenzel"? And what of those who lay in the faraway sand of Saspe Cemetery or in the clay at Brenntau: my poor mama, the foolish and lovable Jan Bronski, and Matzerath, the cook who knew how to transform feelings into soups? All of them needed to be wept for. But Oskar was one of the fortunate who could still weep without onions. My drum helped me. Just a few very special measures were all it took to make Oskar melt into tears that were no better or worse than the expensive tears of the Onion Cellar.

As for Schmuß, the proprietor, he never touched his onions either. In his case the sparrows he shot out of hedges and bushes in his free time filled the bill. Sometimes, after shooting, Schmuß would line up his twelve dead sparrows on a newspaper, shed tears over the little bundles of feathers before they even had time to grow cold, and, still weeping, strew bird food over the Rhine meadows and the pebbles by the water. In the Cellar he had still another outlet for his

sorrow. He had gotten into the habit of giving the washroom attendant a ferocious tongue-lashing once a week, making more and more use of archaic expressions like "slut", "miserable strumpet", "blasted old harridan". "Out of my sight!" we could hear him bellow, "Despicable monster! You're fired!" He would dismiss his victim without notice and hire a new one. But soon he ran into difficulty, there were no washroom attendants left. There was nothing for it but to hire back those he had previously fired. They were only too glad to accept; most of Schmuh's insults didn't mean much to them anyway, and they made good money. The guests at the Onion Cellar—an effect of so much weeping no doubt—made exorbitant use of the facilities, and moreover Homo lacrimans tends to be more generous than his dry-eyed counterpart. Especially the gentlemen, who, after begging leave in voices choked with tears to step out for a minute, could be counted on to reach deep into their purses. Another source of income for the washroom attendant was the sale of the famous onion-print handkerchiefs inscribed with the legend: "In the Onion Cellar". They sold like hotcakes, for when they were no longer needed to wipe the eyes with they made attractive souvenirs and could be worn on the head. They could also be made into pennants which the habitués of the Onion Cellar would hang in the rear windows of their cars, so bearing the fame of Schmuh's Onion Cellar, in vacation time, to Paris, the Côte d'Azur, Rome, Ravenna, Rimini, and even remote Spain.

We musicians and our music had still another function. Occasionally some of the guests would partake of two onions in quick succession; the result was an outbreak that might easily have degenerated into an orgy. Schmuh insisted on a certain restraint; when gentlemen began taking off their ties and ladies undoing their blouses, he would order us to step in with our music and counteract the stirrings of lewdness. However, Schmuh himself was largely responsible for these ticklish situations, what with his insidious habit of serving up a second onion to particularly vulnerable customers.

The most spectacular outburst I can recall was to influence Oskar's whole career, though I shall not go so far as to speak of a crucial turning point. Schmuh's wife, the vivacious Billy, did not come to the Cellar very often, and when she did, it was in the company of friends to whom Schmuh was far from partial. One night she turned up with

Woode, the music critic, and Wackerlei, the architect and pipe-smoker. Both of them were regular customers, but their sorrows were of the most boring variety. Woode wept for religious reasons—he was always being converted or reconverted to something or other; as for Wackerlei, the pipe-smoker, he was still bewailing a professorship he had turned down in the twenties for the sake of a little Danish fly-by-night who had gone and married a South American and had six children by him, which was still a source of grief to Wackerlei and made his pipe go out year after year. It was the somewhat malicious Woode who persuaded Madame Schmuhs to cut into an onion. She cut, the tears flowed, and she began to spill. She laid Schmuhs bare, told stories about him that Oskar will tactfully pass over in silence; it took several of the more powerful customers to prevent Schmuhs from flinging himself on his spouse; don't forget that there were paring knives on every table. In any case, Schmuhs was forcibly restrained until the indiscreet Billy could slip away with her friends Woode and Wackerlei.

Schmuhs was very upset. I could see that by the way his hands flew about arranging and rearranging his onion shawl. Several times he vanished behind the curtain and reviled the washroom attendant. Finally he came back with a full basket and informed his guests in a tone of hysterical glee that he, Schmuhs, was in a generous mood and was going to hand out a free round of onions. Which he proceeded to do.

Every human situation, however painful, strikes Klepp as a terrific joke, but on this occasion he was tense and held his flute at the ready. For we knew how dangerous it was to offer these high-strung people a double portion of tears, of the tears that wash away barriers.

Schmuhs saw that we were holding our instruments in readiness and forbade us to play. At the tables the paring knives were at work. The beautiful outer skins, colored like rosewood, were thrust heedlessly aside. The knives bit into vitreous onion flesh with pale-green stripes. Oddly enough, the weeping did not begin with the ladies. Gentlemen in their prime—the owner of a large flour mill, a hotel-owner with his slightly rouged young friend, a nobleman high in the councils of an important business firm, a whole tableful of men's clothing manufacturers who were in town for a board meeting, the bald actor who was known in the Cellar as the Gnasher, because he gnashed his teeth when he wept—all were in tears before the ladies joined in. But neither the

ladies nor the gentlemen wept the tears of deliverance and release that the first onion had called forth; this was a frantic, convulsive crying jag. The Gnasher gnashed his teeth blood-curdlingly; had he been on the stage, the whole audience would have joined in; the mill-owner hanged his carefully groomed grey head on the table top; the hotel-owner mingled his convulsions with those of his delicate young friend. Schmuu, who stood by the stairs, let his shawl droop and peered with malicious satisfaction at the near-unleashed company. Suddenly, a lady of ripe years tore off her blouse before the eyes of her son-in-law. The hotel-owner's young friend, whose slightly exotic look had already been remarked on, bared his swarthy torso, and leaping from table top to table top performed a dance which exists perhaps somewhere in the Orient. The orgy was under way. But despite the violence with which it began, it was a dull, uninspired affair, hardly worth describing in detail.

Schmuu was disappointed; even Oskar lifted his eyebrows in disgust. One or two cute strip tease acts; men appeared in ladies' underwear, Amazons donned ties and suspenders; a couple or two disappeared under the table; the Gnasher chewed up a brassiere and apparently swallowed some of it.

The hubbub was frightful, wows and yippees with next to nothing behind them. At length Schmuu, disgusted and maybe fearing the police, left his post by the stairs, bent down over us, gave first Klepp, then me a poke, and hissed: "Music! Play something, for God's sake. Make them stop."

But it turned out that Klepp, who was easy to please, was enjoying himself. Shaking with laughter, he couldn't do a thing with his flute. Scholle, who looked on Klepp as his master, imitated everything Klepp did, including his laughter. Only Oskar was left—but Schmuu could rely on me. I pulled my drum from under the bench, nonchalantly lit a cigarette, and began to drum.

Without any notion of what I was going to do, I made myself understood. I forgot all about the usual café concert routine. Nor did Oskar play jazz. For one thing I didn't like to be taken for a percussion maniac. All right, I was a good drummer, but not a hepcat. Sure, I like jazz, but I like Viennese waltzes too. I could play both, but I didn't have to. When Schmuu asked me to step in with my drum, I didn't play anything I had ever learned, I played with my heart. It was a three-year-old Oskar who picked up

use drumsticks. I drummed my way back, I drummed up the world as a three-year-old sees it. And the first thing I did to these postwar humans incapable of a real orgy was to put a harness on them: I led them to Posadowski-Weg, to Auntie Kauer's kindergarten. Soon I had their jaws hanging down; they took each other by the hands, turned their toes in, and waited for me, their Pied Piper. I left my post under the staircase and took the lead. "Bake, bake, bake a cake": that was my first sample. When I had registered my success—childlike merriment on every hand—I decided to scare them out of their wits. "Where's the Witch, back as pitch?" I drummed. And I drummed up the wicked black Witch who gave me an occasional fright in my childhood days and in recent years has terrified me more and more; I made her rage through the Onion Cellar, all her gigantic, coal-black frightfulness, so obtaining the results for which Schmuhs required onions; the ladies and gentlemen wept great round, childlike tears, the ladies and gentlemen were scared pink and green; their teeth chattered, they begged me to have mercy. And so, to comfort them, and in part to help them back into their outer and undergarments, their silks and satins, I drummed: "Green, green, green is my raiment" and "Red, red, red is my raiment", not to mention "Blue, blue, blue . . ." and "Yellow, yellow, yellow". By the time I had gone through all the more familiar colors, my charges were all properly dressed. Thereupon I formed them into a procession, led them through the Onion Cellar as though it were Jeschkentaler-Weg. I led them up the Erbsberg, round the hideous Gutenberg Monument, and on the Johannis-Wiese grew daisies which they, the ladies and gentlemen, were free to pick in innocent merriment. Then, at last, wishing to give as a present, including Schmuhs the head man, something by which to remember their day in kindergarten, I gave them all permission to do number one. We were approaching Devil's Gulch, a sinister place it was, gathering back when I said on my drum: now, children, you may go and they availed themselves of the opportunity. All the ladies and gentlemen, Schmuhs the host, even the first room attendant, all the little children were there. As they passed they went, they all crouched down and listened to the sound they were making and they all went back only when the music had died down—Schmuhs and all the infant sound effects to themselves except for a few faint

—that I ushered in unrestrained merriment with one loud, emphatic boom. All about me the company roared, tittered, babbled childish nonsense:

Smash a little windowpane
Put sugar in your beer,
Mrs. Biddle plays the fiddle,
Dear, dear, dear.

I led them to the cloakroom, where a bewildered student gave Schmuh's kindergarteners their wraps; then, with the familiar ditty "Hard-working washerwoman scrubbing out the clothes," I drummed them up the concrete steps, past the doorman in the rustic sheepskin. I dismissed the kindergarten beneath the night sky of spring, 1950, a trifle cool perhaps, but studded with fairy-tale stars, as though made to order for the occasion. Forgetful of home, they continued for quite some time to make childish mischief in the Old City, until at length the police helped them to remember their age, social position, and telephone number.

As for me, I giggled and caressed my drum as I went back to the Onion Cellar, where Schmuh was still clapping his hands, still standing bowlegged and wet beside the staircase, seemingly as happy in Auntie Kauer's kindergarten as on the Rhine meadows when a grown-up Schmuh went shooting sparrows.

holding his rifle over his knees and caressing it from time to time. We stopped just before Kaiserswerth. On both bank of the Rhine lines of trees: the stage was set. Schmuhs wife stayed in the car and unfolded a newspaper. Klepp had bought some raisins which he munched with noteworthy regularity. Scholle, who had been a student of something or other before taking up the guitar in earnest, managed to conjure up from his memory a number of poems about the river Rhine, which had indeed put its poetic foot forward and, apart from the usual barges, was giving us quite a display of swaying autumnal foliage in the direction of Duisburg, though according to the calendar it was still summer. If Schmuhs rifle had not spoken up from time to time that afternoon below Kaiserswerth might well have been termed peaceful or even serene.

By the time Klepp had finished his raisins and wiped his fingers on the grass, Schmuhs too had finished. Beside the eleven cold balls of feathers on the newspaper, he laid a twelfth—still quivering, as he remarked. The marksman was already packing up his "bag"—for some unfathomable reason Schmuhs always took his victims home with him—when a sparrow settled on a tree root that the river had washed ashore not far from us. The sparrow was so cocky about it, so grey, such a model specimen of a sparrow, that Schmuhs couldn't resist; he who never shot more than twelve sparrows in an afternoon shot a thirteenth—he shouldn't have.

After he had laid the thirteenth beside the twelve, we went back to the black Mercedes and found Madame Schmuhs asleep. Scholle and Klepp got into the back seat. I was about to join them but didn't; I felt like a little walk, I said, I'd take the streetcar, no need to bother about me. And so they drove off without Oskar, who had been very wise not to ride with them.

I followed slowly. I didn't have far to go. There was a detour round a stretch of road that was under repair. The detour passed by a gravel pit. And in this gravel pit, some twenty feet below the surface of the road, lay the black Mercedes with its wheels in the air.

Some workmen from the gravel pit had removed the three injured persons and Schmuhs body from the car. The ambulance was on its way. I climbed down into the pit—my shoes were soon full of gravel—and busied myself a little

with the injured; in spite of the pain they were in, they asked me questions, but I didn't tell them Schmuß was dead. Stiff and startled, he stared up at the sky, which was mostly cloudy. The newspaper containing his afternoon's bag had been flung out of the car. I counted twelve sparrows but couldn't find the thirteenth; I was still looking for it when they eased the ambulance down into the gravel pit.

Schmuß's wife, Klepp, and Scholle had nothing very serious the matter with them: bruises, a few broken ribs. When I went to see Klepp in the hospital and asked him what had caused the accident, he told me an amazing story: As they were driving past the gravel pit, slowly because of the poor condition of the road, hundreds maybe thousands of sparrows had swarmed out of the hedges, bushes, and fruit trees, casting a great shadow over the Mercedes, crashing against the windshield, and frightening Mrs. Schmuß. By sheer sparrow power, they had brought about the accident and Schmuß's death.

You are free to think what you please of Klepp's story; Oskar is skeptical, especially when he considers that when Schmuß was buried in the South Cemetery, he, Oskar, was able to count no more sparrows than years before when he had come here to set up tombstones. Be that as it may, as I, in a borrowed top hat, was following the coffin with the mourners, I caught a glimpse of Korneff in Section Nine, setting up a diorite slab for a two-place grave, with an assistant unknown to me. As the coffin with Schmuß in it was carried past the stonecutter on its way to the newly laid-out Section Ten, Korneff doffed his cap in accordance with cemetery regulations; perhaps because of the top hat, he failed to recognize me, but he rubbed his neck in token of ripening or over-ripe boils.

Funerals! I have been obliged to take you to so many cemeteries. Somewhere, I went so far as to say that funerals remind one of other funerals. Very well, I will refrain from speaking at length of Schmuß's funeral or of Oskar's retrospective musings at the time. Suffice it to say that Schmuß had a normal, decent burial and that nothing unusual happened. All I really have to tell you is that when they had finished burying Schmuß—the widow was in the hospital, or perhaps a little more decorum would have been maintained—I was approached by a gentleman who introduced himself as Dr. Dösch.

Dr. Dösch ran a concert bureau but the concert bureau

did not belong to him. He had been a frequent guest, I told me, at the Onion Cellar. I had never noticed him, but he had been there when I transformed Schmuh's costume into a band of babbling, happy children. Dösch himself, in fact, as he told me in confidence, had returned to childhood bliss under the influence of my drum, and he was dead set on making a big thing out of me and my "terrific stunt", as he called it. He had been authorized to offer me a contract, a terrific contract; why wouldn't I sign it on the spot? Outside the crematorium, where Leo Schugger, who in Düsseldorf bore the name of Willem Slobber, was waiting in his white gloves for the mourners, Dr. Dösch pulled out a paper which, in return for enormous sums of money, committed the undersigned, hereinafter referred to as "Oskar the drummer", to give solo performances in large theaters to appear all by myself on the stage before audiences numbering two to three thousand. Dösch was inconsolable when I said I could not sign right away. As my reason, I gave Schmuh's death; Schmuh, I said, had been very close to me, I just couldn't go to work for someone else before he was cold in his grave, I'd have to think the matter over; maybe I'd take a little trip somewhere; I'd look up Dr. Dösch the moment I got back and then perhaps I would sign this paper that he called a contract.

However, though I signed no contract at the cemetery, Oskar's financial situation impelled him to accept an advance which Dr. Dösch handed me discreetly, hidden away in an envelope with his visiting card, outside the cemetery where he had parked his car.

And I did take the trip, I even found a traveling companion. Actually I should have liked Klepp to go with me. But Klepp was in the hospital, Klepp couldn't even laugh for he had four broken ribs. I should have liked to take Maria. But the summer holidays were still on, little Kurt would have to come with us. And besides, she was still tied up with Stenzel, her boss, who had got Kurt to call him Papa Stenzel.

In the end I set out with Lankes. You remember him no doubt as Corporal Lankes and as the Muse Ulla's sometime fiancé. When, with my advance and my savings book in my pocket, I repaired to Lankes' studio in Sittarder-Strasse I was hoping to find Ulla, my former partner; I thought I would ask the Muse to come along on my trip.

Ulla was there. Right in the doorway she told me: We're engaged. Been engaged for two weeks. It hadn't worked with Hänschen Krages, she had been obliged to break it off. Did I know Hänschen Krages?

No, said Oskar, to his infinite regret he hadn't known Ulla's former fiancé. Then Oskar made his generous offer but before Ulla could accept, Lankes, emerging from the studio, elected himself Oskar's travel companion and boxed the long-legged Muse on the ear because she didn't want to stay home and had burst into tears in her disappointment.

Why didn't Oskar defend himself? Why, if he wanted the Muse as his traveling companion, didn't he take the Muse's part? Much as I was attracted by the prospect of a journey with Ulla by my side, Ulla so slender, Ulla so fuzzy and blond, I feared too close an intimacy with a Muse. Better keep the Muses at a distance, I said to myself, or the kiss of the Muses will get to be a domestic habit. It will be wiser to travel with Lankes, who gives his Muse a good licking when she tries to kiss him.

There was little discussion about our destination. Normandy, of course, where else? We would visit the fortifications between Caen and Cabourg. For that is where we had met during the war. The only difficulty was getting visas. But Oskar isn't one to waste words on visas.

Lankes is a stingy man. The lavishness with which he flings paint—cheap stuff to be sure, and scrounged as often as not—on poorly prepared canvas is equalled only by his tight-fistedness with money, coins as well as paper. A constant smoker, he has never been known to buy a cigarette. Moreover his stinginess is systematic: whenever someone gives him a cigarette, he takes a ten-pfennig piece out of his left pants pocket, raises his cap in a brief gesture of recognition, and drops the coin into his right pants pocket where it takes its place among other coins—how many depends on the time of day. As I have said, he is always smoking, and one day when he was in a good humor, he confided in me: "Every day I make about two marks, just by smoking."

Last year Lankes bought a bombed-out lot in Wersten. He paid for it with the cigarettes of his friends and acquaintances.

This was the Lankes with whom Oskar went to Normandy. We took the train—an express. Lankes would rather

have hitchhiked. But since he was my guest and I was paying, he had to give in. We rode past poplars, behind which there were meadows bounded by hedgerows. Brown and white cows gave the countryside the look of an advertisement for milk chocolate, though of course for advertising purposes one would have had to block out the war damage. The villages, including the village of Bavent where I had lost my Roswitha, were still in pretty bad shape.

From Cabourg we walked along the beach toward the mouth of the Orne. It wasn't raining. As we approached Le Home, Lankes said: "We're home again, my boy. Give me a butt." Before he had finished transferring his coin from pocket to pocket, he stretched out his wolf's head toward one of the numerous unharmed pillboxes in the dunes. With one long arm he toted his knapsack, his traveling easel, and his dozen frames; with the other, he pulled me toward the concrete. Oskar's luggage consisted of a suitcase and his drum.

On the third day of our stay on the Atlantic Coast—we had meanwhile cleared the drifted sand out of Dora Seven, removed the distasteful traces of lovers who had found a haven there, and furnished the place with a crate and our sleeping bags—Lankes came up from the beach with a good-sized codfish. Some fishermen had given it to him in return for a picture he had done of their boat.

In view of the fact that we still called the pillbox Dora Seven, it is hardly surprising that Oskar's thoughts, as he cleaned the fish, turned to Sister Dorothea. The liver and milt spurted over both my hands. While scaling, I faced the sun, which gave Lankes a chance to dash off a water color. We sat behind the pillbox, sheltered from the wind. The August sun beat down on the concrete dome. I larded the fish with garlic. The cavity once occupied by the milt, liver, and entrails, I stuffed with onions, cheese, and thyme; but I didn't throw away the milt and liver; I lodged both delicacies between the fish's jaws, which I wedged open with a lemon. Lankes reconnoitred. He disappeared into Dora Four, Dora Three, and so on down the line. Soon he returned with boards and some large cartons. The cartons he kept to paint on; the wood was for the fire.

There was no difficulty in keeping up the fire; the beach was covered with pieces of dry, feather-light driftwood, casting a variety of shadows. Over the hot coals I laid part of an iron balcony grating which Lankes had torn off a de-

d beach villa. I rubbed the fish with olive oil and set down on the hot grate, which I had also smeared with I squeezed lemon juice over the crackling codfish and it broil slowly—one should never be in a hurry about king fish.

We had made a table by laying a big piece of tarboard over some empty buckets. We had our own forks and tin plates. To divert Lankes—he was circling round the fish like a hungry sea gull—I went to the pillbox and brought out my drum. Bedding it in the sand, I drummed into the wind, variations on the sounds of the surf and the rising tide. Bebra's Theater at the Front had come to inspect the concrete. From Kashubia to Normandy. Felix and Kitty, the two acrobats, tied themselves into knots on top of the pillbox and, just as Oskar was drumming against the wind, he cited against the wind a poem the refrain of which, in the very midst of the war, announced the coming of an era of cozy comfort: ". . . The thought of comfort's like a rug: The trend is toward the bourgeois-smug," declaimed Kitty with her Saxon accent; and Bebra, my wise Bebra, captain of the Propaganda Company, nodded; and Roswitha, my Raguna from the Mediterranean, took up the picnic basket and set the table on the concrete, on top of Dora Seven; and Corporal Lankes, too, ate our white bread, drank our chocolate, and smoked Captain Bebra's cigarettes. . . . "Man!" Lankes called me back from the past. "Man, Oskar! If I could only paint like you drum; give me a butt." I stopped drumming, gave my traveling companion a cigarette, examined the fish, and saw that it was good: the eyes were white, serene, and liquid. Slowly I squeezed a last lemon, omitting not the slightest patch of the skin, which had cracked in places but was otherwise a beautiful brown.

"I'm hungry," said Lankes. He showed his long yellow fangs and, apeline, beat his breast with both fists through his checkered shirt.

"Head or tail?" I asked, setting the fish down on a sheet of waxed paper, which we had spread over the tarboard in lieu of a tablecloth.

"What's your advice?" Lankes pinched out his cigarette and put away the butt.

"As a friend, I'd say: Take the tail. As a cook, I can only recommend the head. On the other hand, if my mama, who was a big fish-eater, were here now, she'd say: Mr.

Lankes, take the tail, then you know what you've got. On the third hand, the doctor used to advise my father . . ."

"I'm not interested in doctors," said Lankes distrustfully.

"Dr. Hollatz advised my father always to eat the head of the codfish."

"Then I'll take the tail. I see you're trying to sell me a bill of goods." Lankes was still suspicious.

"So much the better for Oskar. The head is what I prefer."

"Well, if you're so crazy about it, I'll take the head."

"You're having a tough time, aren't you, Lankes," I said. "All right, the head is yours, I'll take the tail." This, I hoped, would be the end of our dialogue.

"Heh, heh!" said Lankes. "I guess I put one over on you."

Oskar admitted that Lankes had put one over on him. Well I knew that his portion wouldn't taste right unless it were seasoned with the assurance that he had put one over on me. A shrewd article, a lucky bastard, I called him—then we fell to.

He took the head piece, I squeezed what was left of the lemon juice over the white, crumbling flesh of the tail piece, whence, as I picked it up, two or three butter-soft wedges of garlic detached themselves.

Sucking at his bones, Lankes peered over at me and the tail piece: "Give me a taste of your tail." I nodded, he took his taste, and was undecided until Oskar took a taste of his head piece and assured him once again that he, Lankes, had as usual got the better deal.

We drank red Bordeaux with the fish. I felt sorry about it, I should have preferred to see white wine in our coffee cups. Lankes swept my regrets aside; when he was a corporal in Dora Seven, he remembered, they had never drunk anything but red wine. They had still been drinking red wine when the invasion started: "Boy, oh boy, were we liquored up! Kowalski, Scherbach, and little Leuthold didn't even notice anything was wrong. And now they're all in the same cemetery, the other side of Cabourg. Over by Arromanches, it was Tommies, here in our sector, Canadians, millions of them. Before we could get our suspenders up, there they were, saying, 'How are you?'"

A little later, waving his fork and spitting out bones: "Say, who do you think I ran into in Cabourg today? Herzog, Lieutenant Herzog, the nut, you met him on your tour of inspection. You remember him, don't you?"

Of course Oskar remembered Lieutenant Herzog. Lankes went on to tell me over the fish that Herzog returned to labour year in, year out, with maps and surveying instruments, because the thought of these fortifications gave him no sleep. He was planning to drop in at Dora Seven and to a bit of measuring.

We were still on the fish—little by little the contours of his backbone were emerging—when Lieutenant Herzog turned up. Khaki knee breeches, plump calves, tennis shoes; a growth of grey-brown hair emerged from the open neck of his linen shirt. Naturally we kept our seats. Lankes introduced me as Oskar, his peacetime friend and wartime buddy, and addressed Herzog as Reserve Lieutenant Herzog.

The reserve lieutenant began at once to inspect Dora Seven. He began with the outside, and Lankes raised no objection. Herzog filled out charts and examined the land and sea through his binoculars. Then for a moment he caressed the gun embrasures of Dora Six as tenderly as though fondling his wife. When he wished to inspect the inside of Dora Seven, our villa, our summer house, Lankes wouldn't hear of it: "Herzog, man, what's the matter with you? Poking around in concrete. Maybe it was news ten years ago. Now it's passé."

"Passé" is a pet word with Lankes. Everything under the sun is either news or passé. But the reserve lieutenant held that nothing was passé, that the accounts were still unclear, that some of the figures would have to be rectified, that men would always be called upon to give an account of themselves before the judgment seat of history, and that was why he wanted to inspect the inside of Dora Seven: "I hope, Lankes, that I have made myself clear."

Herzog's shadow fell across our table and fish. He meant to pass around us to the pillbox entrance, over which concrete ornaments still bore witness to the creative hand of Corporal Lankes.

But Herzog never got past our table. Rising swiftly, Lankes' fist, still gripping its fork but making no use of it, sent Reserve Lieutenant Herzog sprawling backward on the sand. Shaking his head, deploring the interruption of our meal, Lankes stood up, seized a fistful of the lieutenant's shirt, dragged him to the edge of the dune—the track in the sand was remarkably straight, I recall—and tossed him off. He had vanished from my sight but not, unfortunately, from my hearing. He gathered together his surveying instruments,

which Lankes had thrown after him, and went away grumbling and conjuring up all the historical ghosts that Lank had dismissed as *passé*.

"He's not so very wrong," said Lankes, "even if he is nut. If we hadn't been so soused when the shooting started who knows what would have happened to those Canadians

I could only nod assent, for just the day before, at low tide, I had found the telltale button of a Canadian uniform among the empty crab shells. As pleased as though he had found a rare Etruscan coin, Oscar had secreted the button in his wallet.

Brief as it was, Lieutenant Herzog's visit had conjured up memories: "Do you remember, Lankes, when our theatrical group was inspecting your concrete and we had breakfast on top of the pillbox? There was a little breeze just like today. And suddenly there were six or seven nuns, looking for crabs in the Rommel asparagus, and you, Lankes, you had orders to clear the beach; which you did with a murderous machine gun."

Sucking bones, Lankes remembered; he even remembered their names: Sister Scholastica, Sister Agneta . . . he described the novice as a rosy little face with lots of black around it. His portrait of her was so vivid that it partly, but only partly, concealed the image, which never left me, even my trained nurse, my secular Sister Dorothea. A few minutes later—I wasn't surprised enough to put it down as a miracle—a young nun came drifting across the dunes from the direction of Cabourg. Pink little face, with lots of black around it, there was no mistaking her.

She was shielding herself from the sun with a black umbrella such as elderly gentlemen carry. Over her eyes arched a poison-green celluloid shade, suggesting dynamic movie directors in Hollywood. Off in the dunes someone was calling her. There seemed to be more nuns about. "Sister Agneta!" the voice cried, "Sister Agneta, where are you?"

And Sister Agneta, the young thing who could be seen over the backbone of our codfish: "Here I am, Sister Scholastica. There's no wind here."

Lankes grinned and nodded his wolf's head complacently as though he himself had conjured up this Catholic parade as though nothing in the world could startle him.

The young nun caught sight of us and stopped still, to one side of the pillbox. "Oh!" gasped her rosy face between slightly protruding but otherwise flawless teeth.

Lankes turned head and neck without stirring his body: "Hiya, Sister, taking a little walk?"

How quickly the answer came: "We always go to the sea-shore once a year. But for me it's the first time. I never saw the ocean before. It's so big."

There was no denying that. To this day I look upon her description of the ocean as the only accurate one.

Lankes played the host, poked about in my portion of fish and offered her some: "Won't you try a little fish, Sister? It's still warm."

I was amazed at the ease with which he spoke French, and Oskar also tried his hand at the foreign language: "Nothing to worry about. It's Friday anyway."

But even this tactful allusion to the rules of her order could not move the young girl, so cleverly dissimulated in the nun's clothes, to partake of our repast.

"Do you always live here?" her curiosity impelled her to ask. Our pillbox struck her as pretty and a wee bit comical. But then, unfortunately, the mother superior and five other nuns, all with black umbrellas and green visors, entered the picture over the crest of the dune. Agneta wished away. As far as I could understand the flurry of words clipped by the east wind, she was given a good lecture and made to take her place in the group.

Lankes dreamed. He held his fork in his mouth upside down and gazed at the group floating over the dunes. "That ain't no nuns, it's sailboats."

"Sailboats are white," I objected.

"It's black sailboats." It wasn't easy to argue with Lankes. "The one out there on the left is the flagship. Agneta's a fast corvette. Good sailing weather. Column formation, jib to sternpost, mainmast, mizzenmast, and foremast, all sails set, off to the horizon and England. Think of it: tomorrow morning the Tommies wake up, look out the window, and what do they see: twenty-five thousand nuns, all decked with flags. And here comes the first broadside . . ."

"A new war of religion," I helped him. The flagship, I suggested, should be called the Mary Stuart or the De Valera or, better still, the Don Juan. A new, more mobile Armada avenges Trafalgar. "Death to all Puritans!" was the battle cry and this time the English had no Nelson on hand. Let the invasion begin, England has ceased to be an island.

The conversation was getting too political for Lankes.

"The nuns are steaming away," he announced.

"Sailing," I corrected.

Whether steaming or sailing, they were floating off in the direction of Cabourg, holding umbrellas between themselves and the sun. Only one lagged behind a little, bent down between steps, picked up something, and dropped something. The rest of the fleet made its way slowly, tacking into the wind, toward the gutted beach hotel in the background.

"Looks like her steering gear is damaged or maybe she can't get her anchor up," said Lankes, running his nautical image into the ground. "Hey, that must be Agneta, the fast corvette."

Frigate or corvette, it was indeed Sister Agneta, the novice, who came toward us, picking up shells and throwing some of them away.

"What are you picking up there, Sister?" Lankes could see perfectly well what she was picking up.

"Shells," she pronounced the word very clearly and bent down.

"You allowed to do that? Ain't they earthly goods?"

I came out for Sister Agneta: "You're wrong, Lankes. There's nothing earthly about sea shells."

"Whether they come from the earth or the sea, in any case they are goods and nuns shouldn't have any. Poverty, poverty, and more poverty, that's what nuns should have. Am I right, Sister?"

Sister Agneta smiled through her protruding teeth: "I only take a few. They are for the kindergarten. The children love to play with them. They have never been to the beach."

Agneta stood outside the entrance to the pillbox and cast a furtive, nun's glance inside.

"How do you like our little home?" I asked, trying to make friends. Lankes was more direct: "Come in and take a look at our villa. Won't cost you a penny."

Her pointed high shoes fidgeted under her long skirt, stirring sand that the wind picked up and strewed over our fish. Losing some of her self-assurance, she examined us and the table between us out of eyes that were distinctly light brown. "It surely wouldn't be right."

"Come along, Sister," Lankes swept aside all her objections and stood up. "There's a fine view. You can see the whole beach through the gun slits."

Still she hesitated; her shoes, it occurred to me, must be full of sand. Lankes waved in the direction of the entrance. His concrete ornament cast sharp ornamental shadows. "It's tidy inside."

Perhaps it was Lankes' gesture of invitation that decided the nun to go in. "But just a minute!" And she whisked into the pillbox ahead of Lankes. He wiped his hands on his trousers—a typical painter's gesture—and hung a threat at me before disappearing: "Careful you don't take none of my fish."

But Oskar had his fill of fish. I moved away from the table, surrendered myself to the sandy wind and the exaggerated bellowing of Strong Man Sea. I pulled my drum close with one foot and tried, by drumming, to find a way out of this concrete landscape, this fortified world, this vegetable called Rommel asparagus.

First, with small success, I tried love; once upon a time I too had loved a sister. Not a nun, to be sure, but Sister Dorothea, a nurse. She lived in the Zeidler flat, behind a frosted-glass door. She was very beautiful, but I never saw her. It was too dark in the Zeidler hallway. A fiber runner came between us.

After following this theme to its abortive end on the fiber rug, I tried to convert my early love for Maria into rhythm and set it down on the concrete like quick-growing creepers. But there was Sister Dorothea again, interfering with my love of Maria. A smell of carbolic acid blew in from the sea, gulls in nurse's uniforms waved at me, the sun insisted on glittering like a Red Cross pin.

Oskar was glad when his drumming was interrupted. Sister Scholasitica, the mother superior, was coming back with her five nuns. They looked tired and their umbrellas slanted forlornly: "Have you seen a little nun, our little novice? The child is so young. The child had never seen the ocean before. She must have got lost. Sister Agneta, where are you?"

There was nothing I could do but send the little squadron, now with the wind in their stern, off toward the mouth of the Orne, Arromanches, and Port Winston, where the English had wrested an artificial harbor from the sea. There would hardly have been room for all of them in the pillbox. For a moment, I have to admit, I was tempted to turn to Lankes with their visit, but then friendship, dignity, and all in one, bade me hold out my thumb in the direction of the Orne estuary. The nuns obeyed my thumb and

turned into six receding, black, wind-blown spots on the crest of the dune; their plaintive "Sister Agneta, Sister Agneta" came to me more and more diluted with wind, until at last it was swallowed up in the sand.

Lankes was first to come out. Again the typical painter's gesture: he wiped his hands on his trousers, demanded a cigarette, put it into his shirt pocket, and fell upon the cold fish. "It whets the appetite," he said with a leer, pillaging the tail end which was my share. Then he sprawled himself out in the sun.

"She must be unhappy now," I said accusingly, savoring the word "unhappy."

"How so? Got nothing to be unhappy about."

It was inconceivable to Lankes that his version of human relations might make anyone unhappy.

"What's she doing now?" I asked, though I really meant to ask him something else.

"Sewing," said Lankes with his fork. "Ripped her habit a bit, now she's mending it."

The seamstress came out of the pillbox. At once she opened the umbrella and started to babble gaily, yet, it seemed to me, with a certain strain: "The view is really divine. The whole beach and the ocean too."

She stopped by the wreckage of our fish.

"May I?"

Both of us nodded at once.

"The sea air whets the appetite," I encouraged her. Nodding, she dug into our fish with chapped, reddened hands revealing her hard work in the convent, and filled her mouth. She ate gravely, with pensive concentration, as though mulling over, with the fish, something she had had before the fish.

I looked under her coif. She had left her green reporter's eyeshade in the pillbox. Little beads of sweat, all of equal size, lined up on her smooth forehead, which, in its white starched frame, had a madonna-like quality. Lankes asked for another cigarette though he hadn't smoked the previous one. I tossed him the pack. While he stowed three in his shirt pocket and stuck a fourth between his lips, Sister Agneta turned, threw the umbrella away, ran—only then did I see that she was barefoot—up the dune, and vanished in the direction of the surf.

"Let her run," said Lankes in an oracular tone. "She'll be back or maybe she won't."

For an instant I managed to sit still and watch Lankes smoking. Then I climbed on top of the pillbox and looked out at the beach. The tide had risen and very little beach was left.

"Well?" Lankes asked.

"She's undressing." That was all he could get out of me. "Probably means to go swimming. Wants to cool off."

That struck me as dangerous at high tide, especially so soon after eating. Already she was in up to the knees; her back was bent forward and she sank deeper and deeper. The water could not have been exactly warm, but that didn't seem to bother her: she swam, she swam well, practicing several different strokes, and dove through the waves.

"Let her swim, and come down off that pillbox." I looked behind me and saw Lankes sprawling in the sand and puffing away. The smooth backbone of the codfish glistened white in the sun, dominating the table.

As I jumped off the concrete, Lankes opened his painter's eyes and said: "Christ, what a picture! Nuns at High Tide."

"You monster," I shouted. "Supposing she drowns?" Lankes closed his eyes: "Then we'll call it: Nuns Drowning."

"And if she comes back and flings herself at your feet?"

Wide-eyed, the painter declaimed: "Then she and the picture will be called: *Fallen Nun*."

With him it was always either-or, head or tail, drowned or fallen. He took my cigarettes, threw the lieutenant off the dune, ate my fish, showed the inside of a pillbox to a little girl who was supposed to be the bride of Christ, and while she was still swimming out to sea, drew pictures in the air with his big lumpy foot. He even listed the titles and plotted the formats: Nuns at High Tide, eight by five, Nuns Drowning, Fallen Nuns, Twenty-five Thousand Nuns. Nuns at Trafalgar. Nuns Defeat Lord Nelson. Nuns Bucking the Wind. Nuns Before the Breeze. Nuns Tacking. Black, lots of black; dingy white and cold blue: The Invasion, or Barbaric, Mystical, Bored. And on our return to the Rhineland Lankes actually painted all these pictures, in formats ranging from wide and low to high and narrow. He did whole series of nuns, found a dealer who was wild about nuns, exhibited forty-three of these nunsuch canvases and sold seventeen to collectors, industrialists, museums, and an American; some of the critics even saw fit to compare him, Lankes, to Picasso. It was Lankes' success that persuaded me, Oskar, to

dig up the visiting card of Dr. Dösch, the concert manager, for Lankes' art was not alone in clamoring for bread. The time had come to transmute the prewar and wartime experience of Oskar, the three-year-old drummer, into the pure, resounding gold of the postwar period.

The Ring Finger

"SO THAT'S IT," said Zeidler. "So you've decided not to work any more." It riled him that Klepp and Oskar should spend the whole day sitting either in Klepp's or Oskar's room, doing just about nothing. I had paid the October rent on both rooms out of what was left of Dr. Dösch's advance, but the prospects, financial and otherwise, for November, were bleak.

And yet we had plenty of offers. Any number of dance halls or night clubs would have taken us on. But Oskar was sick of playing jazz. That put a strain on my relations with Klepp. Klepp said my new drum style had no connection with jazz. He was right and I didn't deny it. He said I was disloyal to the jazz ideal. Early in November Klepp found a new percussion man, and a good one at that, namely Bobby from the Unicorn, and was able to accept an engagement in the Old City. After that we were friends again, even though Klepp was already beginning to think, or perhaps it would be safer to say talk, along Communist lines.

In the end Dr. Dösch was my only resort. I couldn't have gone back to live with Maria even if I had wanted to; Stenzel was getting a divorce, meaning to convert my Maria into a Maria Stenzel. From time to time I knocked out an inscription for Korneff or dropped in at the Academy to be blackened or abstracted. Quite frequently I went calling, with nothing definite in mind, on Ulla, who had been obliged to break her engagement to Lankes shortly after our trip to the Atlantic Wall, because Lankes wasn't doing anything but nuns and didn't even want to beat Ulla any more.

Dr. Dösch's visiting card lay silently clamoring on my table beside the bathtub. One day, having decided that I wanted none of Dr. Dösch, I tore it up and threw it away. To my horror I discovered that the address and telephone number were graven on my memory. I could read them off like a poem. I not only could but did. This went on for three days; the telephone number kept me awake at night. On

the fourth day, I went to the nearest telephone booth. Dösch spoke as though he had been expecting my call from one minute to the next and asked me to drop in at the office that same afternoon; he wanted to introduce me to the boss, in fact the boss was expecting me.

The West Concert Bureau had its offices on the eighth floor of a new office building. Expensive carpeting, quantities of chrome, indirect lighting, soundproofing, crisp, long-legged secretaries, wafting their boss's cigar smoke past me; two seconds more and I would have fled.

Dr. Dösch received me with open arms though he did not actually hug me—a narrow escape, it seemed to Oskar. Beside him a green sweater girl was typing; her machine stopped as I entered, but speeded up almost instantly to make up for lost time. Dösch announced me to the boss. Oskar sat down on the front left sixth of an armchair upholstered in English vermilion. A folding door opened, the typewriter held its breath, a hidden force raised me to my feet, the doors closed behind me, a carpet, flowing through the large, luminous room, led me forward until an enormous oak table top supported by steel tubing said to me: now Oskar is standing in front of the boss's desk, I wonder how much he weighs. I raised my blue eyes, looked for the boss behind the infinitely empty oak surface, and found, in a wheelchair that could be cranked up and tipped like a dentist's chair, my friend and master Bebra, paralyzed, living only with his eyes and fingertips.

He still had his voice though. And Bebra's voice spoke: "So we meet again, Mr. Matzerath. Did I not tell you years ago, when you still chose to face the world as a three-year-old, that our kind can never lose one another? However, I see to my regret that you have altered your proportions, immoderately so, and not at all to your advantage. Did you not measure exactly three feet in those days?"

I nodded, on the verge of tears. The wall behind the master's wheelchair—it was operated by an electric motor which gave off a low, steady hum—had just one picture on it: a life-size bust of Roswitha, the great Raguna, in a baroque frame. Bebra didn't have to follow my eyes to know what I was looking at. His lips, when he spoke, were almost motionless: "Ah, yes, our good Roswitha! How, I wonder, would she have liked the new Oskar? Not too well, I think. It was another Oskar that she cared for, a three-year-old with cheeks like a cherub, but oh, so loving! She wor-

hipped him, as she never wearied of telling me. But one day he was disinclined to bring her a cup of coffee; she herself went for it and lost her life. And if I am not mistaken, that is not the only murder committed by our cherubic little Oskar. Is it not true that he drummed his poor mama into her grave?"

I nodded. I looked up at Roswitha, I was able to cry, thank the Lord. Bebra re-coiled for the next blow; "And what of Jan Bronski, the postal secretary, whom three-year-old Oskar liked to call his presumptive father? Oskar handed him over to the centurions who shot him. And now perhaps, Mr. Oskar Matzerath, you who have had the audacity to change your shape, now perhaps you can tell me what became of your second presumptive father, Matzerath the grocer?"

Again I confessed. I admitted that I had murdered Matzerath, because I wanted to be rid of him, and told my judge now I had made him choke to death. I no longer hid behind a Russian tommy gun, but said: "It was I, Master Bebra. I did it; this crime, too, I committed; I am not innocent of his death. Have mercy!"

Bebra laughed, though I don't know what with. His wheelchair trembled, winds ruffled his gnome's hair over the hundred thousand wrinkles that constituted his face.

Again I begged for mercy, charging my voice with a sweetness which I knew to be effective and covering my face with my hands, which I knew to be touchingly beautiful: "Mercy, dear Master Bebra! Have mercy!"

Bebra, who had set himself up as my judge and played the role to perfection, pressed a button on the little ivory-white switchboard that he held between his hands and knees.

The carpet behind me brought in the green sweater girl, carrying a folder. She spread out the contents of the folder on the oak table top, which was roughly on a level with my collarbone, too high for me to see exactly what she was spreading out. Then she handed me a fountain pen: I was to purchase Bebra's mercy with my signature.

Still, I ventured to ask a few questions. I couldn't just sign with my eyes closed.

"The document before you," said Bebra, "is a contract for your professional services. Your full name is required. We have to know whom we are dealing with. First name and last name: Oskar Matzerath."

The moment I had signed, the hum of the electric motor increased in force. I looked up from the fountain pen just

in time to see a wheelchair race across the room and vanish through a side door.

The reader may be tempted to believe that the contract in duplicate to which I affixed my signature provided for the sale of my soul or committed me to some monstrous crime. Nothing of the sort. With the help of Dr. Dösch I studied the contract in the foyer and found no difficulty in understanding that all Oskar had to do was to appear in public all by himself with his drum, to drum as I had drummed as a three-year-old and once again, more recently, in Schmuhs's Onion Cellar. The West Concert Bureau undertook to organize tours for me and to provide suitable advance publicity.

I received a second generous advance, on which I lived while the publicity campaign was in progress. From time to time I dropped in at the office and submitted to interviews and photographers. Dr. Dösch and the sweater girl were always most obliging, but I never saw Master Bebra again.

Even before the first tour I could well have afforded better lodgings. However, I stayed on at Zeidler's for Klepp's sake. Klepp resented my dealings with an agency; I did what I could to placate him but I did not give in, and there were no more expeditions to the Old City to drink beer or eat fresh blood sausage with onions. Instead, to prepare myself for the life of a traveling man, I treated myself to excellent dinners at the railroad station.

Oskar hasn't space enough to describe his success at length. The publicity posters, building me up as miracle man, a faith-healer, and little short of a Messiah, proved scandalously effective. I made my debut in the cities of the Ruhr Valley in halls with a seating capacity of fifteen hundred to two thousand. The spotlight discovered me in a dinner jacket, all alone against a black velvet curtain. I played the drum, but my following did not consist of youthful jazz addicts. No, those who flocked to hear me were the middle-aged, the elderly, and the doddering. My message was addressed most particularly to the aged, and they responded. They did not sit silent as I awakened my three-year-old drum to life; they gave vent to their pleasure, though not in the language of their years, but burbling and babbling like three-year-olds. "Rashu, Rashu!" they piped when Oskar drummed up an episode from the miraculous life of the miraculous Rasputin. But most of my listeners were not really up to Rasputin. My biggest triumphs were with numbers evoking

not any particular happenings, but stages of infancy and childhood. I gave these numbers such titles as: "Baby's First Teeth", "That Beastly Whooping Cough", "Itchy Stockings", "Dream of Fire and You'll Wet Your Bed".

That appealed to the old folks. They went for it hook, line, and sinker. They cut their first teeth and their gums ached. Two thousand old folks hacked and whooped when I infected them with whooping cough. How they scratched when I put woolen stockings on them! Many an old lady, many an aged gentleman wet his or her underwear, not to mention the upholstery he or she was sitting on, when I made the children dream of a fire. I don't recall whether it was in Wuppertal or in Bochum; no, it was in Recklingshausen: I was playing to a house of aged miners, the performance was sponsored by the union. These old-timers, I said to myself, have been handling black coal all their lives; surely they'll be able to put up with a little black fright. Whereupon Oskar drummed "The Wicked Black Witch" and lo and behold, fifteen hundred crusty old miners, who had lived through cave-ins, explosions, flooded pits, strikes, and unemployment, let out the most bloodcurdling screams I have ever heard. Their screams—and this is why I mention the incident—shattered several windows in spite of the heavy drapes covering them. Indirectly, I had recovered my glass-killing voice. However, I made little use of it; I didn't want to ruin my business.

Yes, business was good. When the tour was over and I reckoned up with Dr. Dösch, it turned out that my tin drum was a gold mine.

I hadn't even asked after Bebra the master and had given up hope of seeing him again. But as Dr. Dösch soon informed me, Bebra was waiting for me.

My second meeting with the master was quite different from the first. This time Oskar was not made to stand in front of the oak table top. Instead, I sat in an electric wheelchair, made to order for Oskar. Dr. Dösch had made tape recordings of my press notices, and Bebra and I sat listening as he ran them off. Bebra seemed pleased. To me the effusions of the newspapers were rather embarrassing. They were building me up into a cult, Oskar and his drum had become healers of the body and soul. And what we cured best of all was loss of memory. The word "Oskarism" made its first appearance, but not, I am sorry to say, its last.

Afterward, the sweater girl brought me tea and put two

pills on the master's tongue. We chatted. He had ceased to be my accuser. It was like years before at the Four Seasons Café, except that the Signora, our Roswitha, was missing. When I couldn't help noticing that Master Bebra had fallen asleep over some long-winded story about my past, I spent ten or fifteen minutes playing with my wheelchair, making the motor hum, racing across the floor, circling to left and right. I had difficulty in tearing myself away from this remarkable piece of furniture, which offered all the possibilities of a harmless vice.

My second tour was at Advent. I conceived my program accordingly and was highly praised in the religious press. For I succeeded in turning hardened old sinners into little children, singing Christmas carols in touching watery voices. "Jesus, for thee I live, Jesus, for thee I die," sang two thousand five hundred aged souls, whom no one would have suspected of such childlike innocence or religious zeal.

My third tour coincided with carnival, and again I rearranged my program. No so-called children's carnival could have been merrier or more carefree than those evenings that turned palsied grandmas into Carmens and Indian maidens while Grampa went bang-bang and led his robbers into battle.

After carnival I signed a contract with a record company. The recording was done in soundproof studios. The sterile atmosphere cramped my style at first, but then I had the walls plastered with enormous photographs of old people such as one sees in homes for the aged and on park benches. By fixing my attention on them, I was able to drum with the same conviction as in concert halls full of human warmth.

The records sold like hotcakes. Oskar was rich. Did that make me give up my miserable sometime bathroom in the Zeidler flat? No. Why not? Because of my friend Klepp and also because of the empty room behind the frosted-glass door, where Sister Dorothea had once lived and breathed. What did Oskar do with all his money? He made Maria, his Maria, a proposition.

This is what I said to Maria: If you give Stenzel his walking papers, if you not only forget about marrying him but throw him out altogether, I'll buy you a modern, up-and-coming delicatessen store. Because after all, my dear Maria, you were born for business and not for any no-good Mr. Stenzel.

I was not mistaken in Maria. She gave up Stenzel and with

my financial assistance built up a first-class delicatessen store in Friedrichstrasse. The business prospered and three years later, last week that is—as Maria informed me only yesterday, bursting with joy and not without gratitude—she opened a branch store in Ober-Kassel.

Was it on my return from my seventh or from my eighth tour? In any case it was July and very hot. From the Central Station, where I was besieged by aged autograph hunters, I took a cab straight to the concert bureau and was besieged on alighting by some more aged autograph hunters, who should have been looking after their grandchildren. I sent in my name; the folding doors were open, the carpet still led to the big desk, but behind the desk there was no Bebra and no wheelchair was waiting for me. There was only a smiling Dr. Dösch.

Bebra was dead. He had died several weeks ago. He had not wished them to inform me of his illness. Nothing, not even his death, he had said, must interfere with Oskar's tour. The will was soon read; I inherited a small fortune and the picture of Roswitha that hung over his desk. At the same time I incurred a severe financial loss, for I was in no state to perform. I called off two whole tours—in Southern Germany and Switzerland—on insufficient notice and was sued for breach of contract.

And alas, my loss was more than financial. Bebra's death was a severe blow to me and I did not recover overnight. I locked up my drum and refused to stir from my room. To make matters worse, this was the moment my friend Klepp chose to get married, to take a redheaded cigarette girl as his life companion, and all because he had once given her a photograph of himself. Shortly before the wedding, to which I was not invited, he gave up his room and moved to Stockum. Oskar was left as Zeidler's only roomer.

My relations with the Hedgehog had changed. Now that the papers carried my name in banner headlines, he treated me with respect; in return for a bit of change, he even gave me the key to Sister Dorothea's room. Later I rented the room to prevent anyone else from doing so.

My sorrow had its itinerary. I opened the doors of both rooms, dragged myself from my bathtub down the fiber runner to Dorothea's room, gazed into the empty clothes cupboard, faced the ridicule of the washstand mirror, despaired at the sight of the gross, coverless bed, retreated

pills on the master's tongue. We chatted. He had ceased to be my accuser. It was like years before at the Four Seasons Café, except that the Signora, our Roswitha, was missing. When I couldn't help noticing that Master Bebra had fallen asleep over some long-winded story about my past, I spent ten or fifteen minutes playing with my wheelchair, making the motor hum, racing across the floor, circling to left and right. I had difficulty in tearing myself away from this remarkable piece of furniture, which offered all the possibilities of a harmless vice.

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heavy for this kind of weather. Lux was gone and did not come back. Of course no cast-iron cable drum could take the place of my little tin drum, but even so: gradually I slipped back into the past. When I bogged down, when the images of the last few years, full of hospitals and nurses, insisted on recurring, I picked up two dry sticks, and said to myself: Just wait a minute, Oskar. Let's see now who you are and where you're from. And there they glowed, the two sixty-watt bulbs of the hour of my birth. Between them the moth drummed, while the storm moved furniture in the distance. I heard Matzerath speak, and a moment later my mama. He promised me the store, she promised me a toy; at the age of three I would be given a drum, and so Oskar tried to make the three years pass as quickly as possible; I ate, drank, evacuated, put on weight, let them weigh me, swaddle, bathe, brush, powder, vaccinate, and admire me; I let them call me by name, smiled when expected to, laughed when necessary, went to sleep at the proper time, woke up punctually, and in my sleep made the face that grownups call an angel face. I had diarrhea a few times and several colds, caught whooping cough, hung on to it, and relinquished it only when I had mastered its difficult rhythm, when I had it in my wrists forever, for, as we know, "Whooping Cough" is one of the pieces in my repertory, and when Oskar played "Whooping Cough" to an audience of two thousand, two thousand old men and women hacked and whooped.

Lux whimpered at my feet, rubbed against my knees. Oh, this rented dog that my loneliness had made me rent! There he stood four-legged and tail-wagging, definitely a dog, with that doggy look and something or other in his slavering jaws: a stick, a stone, or whatever may seem desirable to a dog.

Slowly my childhood—the childhood that means so much to me—slipped away. The pain in my gums, foreshadowing my first teeth, died down; tired, I leaned back: an adult hunchback, carefully though rather too warmly dressed, with a wristwatch, identification papers, a bundle of banknotes in his billfold. I put a cigarette between my lips, set a m^{outh} to it, and trusted the tobacco to expel that obsessive of childhood from my oral cavity.

And Lux? Lux rubbed against me. I pushed him away, blew cigarette smoke at him. He didn't like that. He moved his ground and kept on rubbing. He licked me. I searched the nearby telegraph wires for swa

it seemed to me against importunate dogs. There were no swallows and Lux refused to be driven away. He nuzzled in between my trouser legs, finding his way to a certain spot with as much assurance as if his East Prussian employer had trained him for that kind of thing.

The heel of my shoe struck him twice. He retreated a few feet and stood there, four-legged and quivering, but continued to offer me his muzzle with its stick or stone as insistently as if what he was holding had been not a stick or stone but my wallet which I could feel in my jacket or my watch that was ticking audibly on my wrist.

What then was he holding? What was so important, so eminently worth showing me?

I reached out between his warm jaws, I had the thing in my hand, I knew what I was holding but pretended to be puzzled, as though looking for a word to name this object that Lux had brought me from the rye field.

There are parts of the human body which can be examined more easily and accurately when detached, when alienated from the center. It was a finger. A woman's finger. A ring finger. A woman's ring finger. A woman's finger with an attractive ring on it. Between the metacarpus and the first finger joint, some three-quarters of an inch below the ring, the finger had allowed itself to be chopped off. The section was neat, clearly revealing the tendon of the extensor muscle.

It was a beautiful finger, a mobile finger. The stone on the ring was held in place by six gold claws. I identified it at once—correctly, it later turned out—as an aquamarine. The ring itself was worn so thin at one place that I set it down as an heirloom. Despite the line of dirt, or rather of earth under the nail, as though the finger had been obliged to scratch or dig earth, the nail seemed to have been carefully manicured. Once I had removed it from the dog's warm muzzle, the finger felt cold and its peculiarly yellowish pallor also suggested coldness.

For several months Oskar had been wearing a silk handkerchief in his breast pocket. He laid the ring finger down on this square of silk and observed that the inside of the finger up to the third joint was marked with lines indicating that this had been a hard-working finger with a relentless sense of duty.

After folding up the finger in the handkerchief, I rose from the cable drum, stroked Lux's neck, and started for

home, carrying handkerchief and finger in my right hand. Planning to do this and that with my find, I came to the fence of a nearby garden. It was then that Vittlar, who had been lying in the crook of an apple tree, observing me and the dog, addressed me.

The Last Streetcar, or Adoration of a Preserving Jar

THAT VOICE FOR one thing, that arrogant, affected whine! Besides, he was lying in the crook of an apple tree. "That's a smart dog you've got there," he whined.

I, rather bewildered: "What are you doing up there?" He stretched languidly: "They are only cooking apples. I assure you, you have nothing to fear."

He was beginning to get on my nerves: "Who cares what kind of apples you've got? And what do you expect me to fear?"

"Oh, well!" His whine was almost a hiss. "You might mistake me for the Snake. There were cooking apples even in those days."

I, angrily: "Allegorical rubbish!"

He, slyly: "I suppose you think only eating apples are worth sinning for?"

I was about to go. I hadn't the slightest desire to discuss the fruit situation in Paradise. Then he tried a more direct approach. Jumping nimbly down from the tree, he stood long and willowy by the fence: "What did your dog find in the rye?"

I can't imagine why I said: "A stone."

"And you put the stone in your pocket?" Blessed if he wasn't beginning to cross-examine me.

"I like to carry stones in my pocket."

"It looked more like a stick to me."

"That may well be. But I still say it's a stone."

"Aha! So it is a stick?"

"For all I care: stick or stone, cooking apples or eating apples . . ."

"A flexible little stick?"

"The dog wants to go home. I'll have to be leaving."

"A flesh-colored stick?"

"Why don't you attend to your apples? Come along, Lux."

"A flesh-colored, flexible little stick with a ring on it?"

"What do you want of me? I'm just a man taking a walk with this dog I borrowed to take a walk with."

"Splendid. See here, I should like to borrow something too. Won't you let me, just for a second, try on that handsome ring that sparkled on the stick and turned it into a ring finger? My name is Vittlar. Gottfried von Vittlar. I am the last of our line."

So it was that I made Vittlar's acquaintance. Before the day was out, we were friends, and I still call him my friend. Only a few days ago, when he came to see me, I said: "I am so glad, my dear Gottfried, that it was you who turned me in to the police and not some common stranger."

If angels exist, they must look like Vittlar: long, willowy, vivacious, collapsible, more likely to throw their arms around the most barren of lampposts than a soft, eager young girl.

You don't see Vittlar at first. According to his surroundings, he can make himself look like a thread, a scarecrow, a clothestree, or the limb of a tree. That indeed is why I failed to notice him when I sat on the cable drum and he lay in the apple tree. The dog didn't even bark, for dogs can neither see, smell, nor bark at an angel.

"Will you be kind enough, my dear Gottfried," I asked him the day before yesterday, "to send me a copy of the statement you made to the police just about two years ago?" It was this statement that led to my trial and formed the basis of Vittlar's subsequent testimony.

Here is the copy, I shall let him speak as he testified against me in court:

On the day in question, I, Gottfried Vittlar, was lying in the crook of an apple tree that grows at the edge of my mother's garden and bears each year enough apples to fill our seven preserving jars with applesauce. I was lying on my side, my left hip embedded in the bottom of the crook, which is somewhat mossy. My feet were pointing in the direction of the Gerresheim glassworks. What was I looking at? I was looking straight ahead, waiting for something to happen within my field of vision.

The accused, who is today my friend, entered my field of vision. A dog came with him, circling round him, behaving like a dog. His name, as the accused later told me, was Lux, he was a rottweiler, and could be rented at a "dog rental shop" not far from St. Roch's Church.

The accused sat down on the empty cable drum which has been lying ever since the war outside the aforesaid kitchen garden belonging to my mother, Alice von Vittlar. At the

court knows, the accused is a small man. Moreover, if we are to be strictly truthful, he is deformed. This fact caught my attention. What struck me even more was his behavior. The small, well-dressed gentleman proceeded to drum on the rusty cable drum, first with his fingers, then with two dry sticks. If you bear in mind that the accused is a drummer by trade and that, as has been established beyond any shadow of a doubt, he practices his trade at all times and places; if you consider, furthermore, that there is something about a cable drum which, as the name suggests, incites people to drum on it, it seems in no wise unreasonable to aver that one sultry summer day the accused Oskar Matzerath sat on a cable drum situated outside the kitchen garden of Mrs. Alice von Vittelar, producing rhythmically arranged sound with the help of two willow sticks of unequal length.

I further testify that the dog Lux vanished for some time into a field of rye; yes, the rye was about ready to mow. If asked exactly how long he was gone, I should be unable to reply, because the moment I lie down in the crook of our apple tree, I lose all sense of time. If I say notwithstanding that the dog disappeared for a considerable time, it means that I missed him, because I liked his black coat and floppy ears.

The accused, however—I feel justified in saying—did not miss the dog.

When the dog Lux came back out of the ripe rye, he was carrying something between his teeth. I thought of a stick, a one, or perhaps, though even then it did not seem very likely, a tin can or even a tin spoon. Only when the accused removed the corpus delicti from the dog's muzzle did I definitely recognize it for what it was. But between the moment when the dog rubbed his muzzle, still holding the object, against the trouser leg of the accused—the left trouser leg, I should say—to the moment when the accused took possession of it, several minutes passed—exactly how many I should not venture to say.

The dog tried very hard to attract the attention of his temporary master; the accused, however, continued to drum in his monotonous, obsessive, disconcerting, I might say childish way. Only when the dog resorted to indecency, forcing his moist muzzle between the legs of the accused, did he drop the willow sticks and give the dog a kick with his right—yes, of that I am perfectly sure—foot. The dog described a half-circle, came back, trembling like a dog, and once

again presented his muzzle and the object it held. Without rising, the accused—with his left hand—reached between the dog's teeth. Relieved of his find, the dog Lux backed away a few feet. The accused remained seated, held the object in his hand, closed his hand, opened it, closed it, and the next time he opened his hand, I could see something sparkle. When the accused had grown accustomed to the sight of the object, he held it up with his thumb and forefinger, approximately at eye level.

Only then did I identify the object as a finger, and a moment later, because of the sparkle, more specifically as a ring finger. Unsuspecting, I had given a name to one of the most interesting criminal cases of the postwar period. And indeed, I, Gottfried Vittlar, have frequently been referred to as the star witness in the Ring Finger Case.

Since the accused remained motionless, I followed suit. In fact, his immobility communicated itself to me. And when the accused wrapped the finger and ring carefully in the handkerchief he had previously worn in his breast pocket, I felt a stirring of sympathy for the man on the cable drum: how neat and methodical he is; now there's a man I'd like to know.

So it was that I called out to him as he was about to leave in the direction of Gerresheim with his rented dog. His first reaction, however, was irritable, almost arrogant. To this day, I cannot understand why, just because I was lying in a tree, he should have taken me for a symbolic snake and even suspected my mother's cooking apples of being the Paradise variety.

It may well be a favorite habit with the Tempter to lie in the crooks of trees. In my case, it was just boredom, a state of mind I come by without effort, that impelled me to assume a recumbent position several times a week in the aforesaid tree. Perhaps boredom is in itself the absolute evil. And now let me ask: What motive drove the accused to Gerresheim in the outskirts of Düsseldorf that sultry day? Loneliness, as he later confessed to me. But are not loneliness and boredom twin sisters? I bring up these points only in order to explain the accused, not in order to confound him. For what made me take a liking to him, speak to him, and finally make friends with him was precisely his particular variety of evil, that drumming of his, which resolved evil into its rhythmical components. Even my denunciation of him, the act which has brought us here, him as the accused, myself as a witness,

was a game we invented, a means of diverting and entertaining our boredom and our loneliness.

After some hesitation the accused, in response to my request, slipped the ring off the ring finger—it came off without difficulty—and onto my little finger. It was a good fit and I was extremely pleased. It hardly seems necessary to tell you that I came down out of the tree before trying on the ring. Standing on either side of the fence, we introduced ourselves and chatted a while, touching on various political topics, and then he gave me the ring. He kept the finger, which he handled with great care. We agreed that it was a woman's finger. While I held the ring and let the light play on it, the accused, with his left hand, beat a lively little dance rhythm on the fence. The wooden fence surrounding my mother's garden is in a very dilapidated state: it rattled, clattered, and vibrated in response to the accused's drumming. I do not know how long we stood there, conversing with our eyes. We were engaged in this innocent pastime when we heard airplane engines at a moderate altitude; the plane was probably getting ready to land in Lohhausen. Although both of us were curious to know whether it was going to land on two or four engines, we did not interrupt our exchange of glances nor look up at the plane; later on, when we had occasion to play the game again, we gave it a name: Leo Schugger's asceticism; Leo Schugger, it appears, is the name of a friend with whom the accused had played this game years before, usually in cemeteries.

After the plane had found its landing field—whether on two or four engines I am at a loss to say—I gave back the ring. The accused put it on the ring finger, which he folded up again in the handkerchief, and asked me to go with him some of the way.

That was on July 7, 1951. We walked as far as the street-car terminus in Gerresheim, but the vehicle we mounted was a cab. Since then the accused has found frequent occasion to treat me with the utmost generosity. We rode into town and had the taxi wait outside the dog rental shop near St. Roch's Church. Having got rid of the dog Lux, we rode across town, through Bilk and Oberbilk to Wersten Cemetery, where Mr. Matzerath had more than twelve marks fare to pay. Then we went to Korneff's stone-cutting establishment.

The place was disgustingly filthy and I was glad when the stonecutter had completed my friend's commission—it took

about an hour. While my friend lovingly lectured to me about the tools and the various kinds of stone, Mr. Korneff, without a word of comment on the finger, made a plaster cast of it—without the ring. I watched him with only half an eye. First the finger had to be treated; that is, he smeared it with fat and ran a string round the edge. Then he applied the plaster, but before it was quite hard split the mold in two with the string. I am by trade a decorator and the making of plaster molds is nothing new to me; nevertheless, the moment Mr. Korneff had picked up that finger, it took on—or so I thought—an unesthetic quality which it lost only after the cast was finished and the accused had recovered the finger and wiped the grease off it. My friend paid the stonecutter, though at first Mr. Korneff was reluctant to take money, for he regarded Mr. Matzerath as a colleague, and further pointed out that Oskar, as he called Mr. Matzerath, had squeezed out his boils free of charge. When the cast had hardened, the stonecutter opened the mold, gave Mr. Matzerath the cast, and promised to make him a few more in the next few days. Then he saw us out to Bittweg through his display of tombstones.

A second taxi ride took us to the Central Station. There the accused treated me to a copious dinner in the excellent station restaurant. From his familiar tone with the waiters I inferred that he must be a regular customer. We ate boiled beef with fresh horseradish, Rhine salmon, and cheese, the whole topped off with a bottle of champagne. When the conversation drifted back to the finger, I advised him to consider it as someone else's property, to send it in to the Lost and Found, especially as he had a cast of it. To this the accused replied very firmly that he regarded himself as the rightful owner, because he had been promised just such a finger on the occasion of his birth—in code to be sure, the word actually employed being "drumstick"; further, certain finger-length scars on the back of his friend Herbert Truczinski had forecast this ring-finger; finally, the cartridge case he had found in Saspe Cemetery had also had the dimensions and implications of a future ring finger.

Though at first I smiled at my new-found friend's arguments, I had to admit that a man of discernment could not fail to see through the sequence: drumstick, scar, cartridge case, ring finger.

A third taxi took me home after dinner. We made an

appointment to meet again, and when I visited my friend three days later, he had a surprise for me.

First he showed me his rooms. Originally, he had rented only one, a wretched little place formerly used as a bathroom, but later on, when his drum recitals had brought him wealth and fame, he had undertaken to pay a second rent for a windowless recess which he referred to as Sister Dorothea's room, and ultimately he had rented a third room, formerly occupied by a Mr. Münzer, a musician and associate of the accused. All this cost him a pretty penny, for Mr. Zeidler, the landlord, was well aware of Mr. Matzerath's prosperity and determined to profit by it.

It was in Sister Dorothea's room that the accused had prepared his surprise. On the marble top of a washstand—or perhaps I should call this article of furniture a dressing table because of the mirror behind it—stood a preserving jar about the size of those which my mother, Alice von Vittlar, uses for putting up the applesauce she makes from our cooking apples. This preserving jar, however, contained not applesauce but the ring finger, swimming in alcohol. Proudly the accused showed me several thick scientific books which he had consulted while preserving the finger. I leafed absently through them, pausing only at the illustrations, but admitted that the accused had done an excellent job and that the finger's appearance was unchanged. Speaking as a decorator, I also told him that the glass with its contents looked interestingly decorative at the foot of the mirror.

When the accused saw that I had made friends with the preserving jar, he informed me that he sometimes worshiped it and prayed to it. My curiosity was aroused and I asked him for a sample of his prayers. He asked me a favor in return: providing me with paper and pencil, he asked me to write his prayer down. I could ask questions as he went along; while praying, he would answer to the best of his knowledge.

Here I give in testimony the words of the accused, my questions, his answers: Adoration of a preserving jar: I adore. Who, I? Oskar or I? I, piously; Oskar, with distraction. Devotion, perpetual, never mind about repetitions. I, discerning because without recollections; Oskar, discerning because full of recollections. I, cold, hot, lukewarm. Guilty under examination. Innocent without examination. Guilty because of, succumbed because of, remitted my guilt, unloaded the guilt on, fought through to, kept free of, laughed at and

about, wept for, over, without, blasphemed in speech, blasphemed in silence, I speak not, I am not silent, I pray. I adore. What? A glass jar. What kind of a jar? A preserving jar. What is preserved in it? A finger. What sort of finger? A ring finger. Whose finger? Blond. Who's blond? Medium height. Five feet four? Five feet five. Distinguishing marks? A mole. Where? Inside of arm. Left, right? Right. Ring finger where? Left. Engaged? Yes, but not married. Religion? Protestant. Virgin? Virgin. Born? Don't know. Where? Near Hanover. When? December. Sagittarius or Capricorn? Sagittarius. Character? Timid. Good-natured? Conscientious, talkative. Sensible? Economical, matter-of-fact, but cheerful. Shy? Fond of goodies, straightforward, and bigoted. Pale, dreams of traveling, menstruation irregular, lazy, likes to suffer and talk about it, lacks imagination, passive, waits to see what will happen, good listener, nods in agreement, folds her arms, lowers eyelids when speaking, opens eyes wide when spoken to, light-grey with brown close to pupil, ring a present from boss, married man, didn't want to take it at first, took it, terrible experience, fibers, Satan, lots of white, took trip, moved, came back, couldn't stop, jealous, too, but for no reason. Sickness but not, death but not, yes, no, don't know, I can't go on. Picking cornflowers when murderer arrived, no, murderer was with her all along . . . Amen? Amen.

Republic; as he himself put it, he didn't want to get into the usual international rat race. He never drummed or prayed to the jar before performing. But after his appearance and a long-drawn-out dinner we would repair to his hotel room: then he drummed and prayed, while I asked questions and wrote; afterwards we would compare his prayer with those of the previous days and weeks. The prayers vary in length. Sometimes the words clashed violently, on other days the rhythm was fluid, almost meditative. Yet the prayers I collected, which I herewith submit to the court, contain no more information than my first transcript, which I incorporated in my deposition.

In the course of the year, I became superficially acquainted, between tours, with a few of Mr. Matzerath's friends and relatives. I met his stepmother, Mrs. Maria Matzerath, whom the accused adores, though with a certain restraint. And the same afternoon I made the acquaintance of Kurt Matzerath, the accused's half brother, a well-behaved boy of eleven. Mrs. Augusta Köster, the sister of Mrs. Maria Matzerath, also made a favorable impression on me. As the accused confessed to me, his relations with his family became more than strained during the first postwar years. It was only when Mr. Matzerath helped his stepmother to set up a large delicatessen store, which also carries tropical fruit, and helped financially whenever business difficulties arose, that relations between stepmother and stepson became really friendly.

Mr. Matzerath also introduced me to a number of former colleagues, for the most part jazz musicians. Mr. Münzer, whom the accused calls familiarly Klepp, struck me as a cheerful and amiable sort, but so far I have not had the energy or desire to develop these contacts.

Though, thanks to the generosity of the accused, I had no need to practice my trade during this period, love of my profession led me, between tours, to decorate a showcase or two. The accused took a *friendly interest in my work*. Often, late at night, he would stand out in the street, looking on as I practiced my modest arts. Occasionally, when the work was done, we would do the town a bit, though we avoided the Old City because the accused, as he himself explained, couldn't stand the sight of any more bull's-eye panes or signs in old-fashioned Gothic lettering. One of these excursions—and I am coming to the end of my deposition—took us through Unterrath to the car barn. It was past midnight.

We stood there at peace with the world and each other,

watching the last cars pull in according to schedule. It's quite a sight. The dark city round about. In the distance, because it was Friday, the roaring of a drunken workman. Otherwise silence, because the last cars, even when they ring their bells and squeak on the curves, make no noise. Most of the cars ran straight into the barn. But a few stood outside, facing every which way, empty, but festively lighted. Who had the idea? Both of us, but it was I who said: "Well, my dear friend, what do you say?" Mr. Matzerath nodded, we got in without haste, I took the motorman's place and immediately felt quite at home. I started off gently, but gradually gathered speed. I turned out to be a good motorman. Matzerath—by now the brightly lit barn was behind us—acknowledged my prowess with these words: "You must have been baptized a Catholic, Gottfried, to be able to run a streetcar so well."

Indeed, this unaccustomed occupation gave me great pleasure. At the car barn no one seemed to have noticed our departure, for we were not followed, and they could easily have stopped us by turning off the current. I took the direction of Flingern; after Flingern I thought of turning left at Haniel and going on toward Rath and Ratingen, but Mr. Matzerath asked me to head for Grafenberg and Geresheim. Though I had misgivings about the hill below the Lions' Den Dance Hall, I acceded to the request of the accused. I made the hill, the dance hall was behind me, but then I had to jam on the brakes because three men were standing on the tracks.

Shortly after Haniel, Mr. Matzerath had gone inside the car to smoke a cigarette. So it was I, the motorman, who had to cry "All aboard!" Two of the men were wearing green hats with black bands; the third, whom they held between them, was hatless. I observed that in getting on this third man missed the running board several times, either because of clumsiness or poor eyesight. His companions or guards helped him, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they dragged him brutally onto my motorman's platform and then into the car.

I had started off again when suddenly from behind me, from inside the car, I heard a pitiful whimpering and a sound as of someone being slapped. But then I was reassured to hear the firm voice of Mr. Matzerath giving the new arrivals a piece of his mind, telling them to stop hitting an injured, half-blind man who had lost his glasses.

"You mind your own business," I heard one of the green

hats roar. "This time he's going to get what's coming to him. It's been going on long enough."

While I drove on slowly in the direction of Gerresheim, my friend Matzerath asked what the poor fellow had done. Then the conversation took a strange turn: We were carried back to the days, in fact to the very first day, of the war: September 1, 1939; it seemed that this man, who was so nearsighted as to be almost blind, had participated as an irregular in the defense of some Polish post office. Strange to say, Mr. Matzerath, who could not have been more than fifteen at the time, knew all about it; he even recognized the poor devil as one Victor Weluhn, a near-sighted carrier of money orders, who had lost his glasses in the battle, escaped while the battle was still on, and given his pursuers the slip. But the chase had continued, they had pursued him till the end of the war, and even then they had not given up. They produced a paper issued in 1939, an execution order. At last they had him, cried the one green hat; the other agreed: "And damn glad to get it over with. I've given up all my free time, even my vacations. An order, if you please, is an order, and this one has been hanging fire since '39. You think I've nothing else to do? I've got my work." He was a salesman, it appeared, and his associate had his troubles too, he had lost a good business in the East Zone and been obliged to start up from scratch. "But enough's enough; tonight we carry out that order, and that's an end to the past. Damn lucky we were to catch the last car!"

Thus quite unintentionally I became a motorman on a streetcar carrying two executioners and their intended victim to Gerresheim. The Gerresheim marketplace was deserted and looked rather lopsided; here I turned right, meaning to unload my passengers at the terminus near the glassworks and start home with Mr. Matzerath. Three stations before the terminus, Mr. Matzerath came out on the platform and deposited his briefcase, in which as I knew the preserving jar stood upright, approximately in the place where professional motormen put their lunch-boxes.

"We've got to save him. It's Victor, poor Victor!" Mr. Matzerath was very upset.

"He still hasn't found glasses to fit him. He's terribly nearsighted, they'll shoot him and he'll be looking in the wrong direction." The executioners looked unarmed to me. But Mr. Matzerath had noticed the ungainly lumps in their coats.

the clouds. And Mr. Matzerath began to drum . . . desperately.

A strange rhythm, yet it seemed familiar. Over and over again the letter O took form: lost, not yet lost, Poland is not yet lost! But that was the voice of poor Victor, he knew the words to Mr. Matzerath's drumming: While we live, Poland cannot die. The green hats, too, seemed to know that rhythm, I could see them take fright behind their hardware in the moonlight. And well they might. For the march that Mr. Matzerath and poor Victor struck up in my mother's garden awakened the Polish cavalry to life. Maybe the moon helped, or maybe it was the drum, the moon, and poor, nearsighted Victor's cracking voice all together that sent those multitudes of horsemen springing from the ground: stallions whinnied, hoofs thundered, nostrils fumed, spurs jangled, hurrah, hurrah! . . . No, not at all: no thundering, no jangling, whinnying, or shouts of hurrah; silently they glided over the harvested fields outside of Gerresheim, but beyond any doubt they were a squadron of Polish Uhlans, for red and white like Mr. Matzerath's lacquered drum, the pennants clung to the lances; no, clung is not right, they floated, they glided, and indeed the whole squadron floated beneath the moon, coming perhaps from the moon, floated off, wheeled to the left, toward our garden, floated, seemingly not of flesh and blood, floated like toys fresh out of the box, phantoms, comparable perhaps to the spooklike figures that Mr. Matzerath's keeper makes out of knotted string: Polish cavalry of knotted string, soundless yet thundering, fleshless, bloodless, and yet Polish, down upon us they thundered, and we threw ourselves upon the ground while the moon and Poland's horsemen passed over us and over my mother's garden and all the other carefully tended gardens. But they did not harm the gardens. They merely took along poor Victor and the two executioners and were lost in the open fields under the moon—lost, not yet lost, they galloped off to the east, toward Poland beyond the moon.

Panting, we waited for the night to quiet down, for the heavens to close again and remove the light that alone could have persuaded those riders long dead, long dust, to mount a last charge. I was first to stand up. Though I did not underestimate the influence of the moon, I congratulated Mr. Matzerath on his brilliant performance; a triumph I called it. He waved me aside with a weary, dejected gesture: "Triumph,

my dear Gottfried? I have had too many triumphs, too much success in my life. What I would like is to be unsuccessful for once. But that is very difficult and calls for a great deal of work."

This speech was not to my liking, because I am the hard-working, conscientious type and have never met with the least success, let alone a triumph. It seemed to me that Mr. Matzerath showed a lack of gratitude, and I told him as much. "You are being very arrogant, Oskar," I ventured—by then we were calling each other by our first names. "All the papers are full of you. You've made a name for yourself. I'm not thinking of money. But do you suppose that it is easy for me, whom no newspaper has ever so much as mentioned, to live side by side with a darling of fame like you. Oh, how I long to do something big, unique, spectacular like what you have just done, to do it all by myself and get into the newspapers, to appear in print: This was the achievement of Gottfried von Vittlar."

I was offended at Mr. Matzerath's laughter. He lay on his back, rolling his hump in the loose earth, pulling out clumps of grass with both hands, tossing them up in the air, and laughing like an inhuman god who can do anything he pleases: "Nothing could be simpler, my friend. Here, take this briefcase. Luckily, the Polish cavalry hasn't crushed it. I make you a present of it; it contains a jar with a ring finger in it. Take it; run to Gerresheim, the streetcar is still there with all the lights on. Get in, drive to the Fürstenwall, take my present to Police Headquarters. Report me, and tomorrow you'll see your name in all the papers."

At first I rejected his offer; I argued that he wouldn't be able to live without his jar and his finger. But he reassured me; he said he was sick of the whole finger business, besides he had several plaster casts, he had even had a gold cast made. So would I please make up my mind, pick up the briefcase, get in that car, and go to the police.

So off I went. I could long hear Mr. Matzerath laughing behind me. He stayed there, lying on his back, he wanted to savor the charms of the night while I rode off ting-a-ling into town. I didn't go to the police until the following morning, but my report, thanks to Mr. Matzerath's kindness, brought me quite a lot of attention in the papers.

Meanwhile I, the kindly Mr. Matzerath, lay laughing in the night-black grass outside Gerresheim, rolled with laughter

within sight of several deadly serious stars, laughed so hard that I worked my hump into the warm earth, and thought: Sleep, Oskar, sleep a little while before the police come and wake you up. Never again will you lie so free beneath the moon.

And when I awoke, I noticed, before noticing that it was broad daylight, that something, someone was licking my face: the quality of the sensation was warm, rough but not very, and moist.

Could that be the police so soon, awakened by Vittlar and now licking you awake? Nevertheless, I was in no hurry to open my eyes, but let myself be licked a while: warmly, moistly, not too roughly, it was quite pleasant. I chose not to care who was licking me: it's either the police, Oskar conjectured, or a cow. Only then did I open my blue eyes.

Spotted black and white, she breathed on me and licked me until I opened my eyes. It was broad daylight, clear to cloudy, and I said to myself: Oskar, don't waste your time on this cow even if there is something divine in her way of looking at you. Don't let that rasping-soothing tongue of hers tranquilize you by shutting off your memory. It is day, the flies are buzzing, you must run for your life. Vittlar is turning you in; consequently, you must flee. You can't have a bona fide denunciation without a bona fide flight. Leave the cow to her mooing and make your getaway. They will catch you either way, but why let that worry you?

And so, licked, washed, and combed by a cow, I fled. After the very first steps of my flight, I burst into a gale of fresh, early-morning laughter. Leaving my drum with the cow, who lay still and mooded, I embarked, laughing, upon my flight.

Thirty

AH, YES, MY flight, my getaway. There's still that to tell you about. I fled in order to enhance the value of Vittlar's denunciation. A getaway, I said to myself, requires first of all a destination. Whither, O Oskar, will you flee? Political obstacles, the so-called Iron Curtain, forbade me to flee eastward. It was not possible to head for my grandmother Anna Koljaiczek's four skirts, which to this day billow protectively in the Kashubian potato fields, although I told myself that if flight there must be, my grandmother's skirts were the only worthwhile destination.

Just in passing: today is my thirtieth birthday. At the age of thirty, one is obliged to discuss serious matters like flight as a man and not as a boy. As she brought in the cake with the thirty candles, Maria said: "You're thirty now, Oskar. It's time you were getting some sense into your head."

Klepp, my friend Klepp, gave me as usual some jazz records and used five matches to light the thirty candles on my cake: "Life begins at thirty!" said Klepp; he is twenty-nine.

Vittlar, however, my friend Gottfried, who is dearest to my heart, gave me sweets, bent down over the bars of my bed, and whined: "When Jesus was thirty years of age, he set forth and gathered disciples round him."

Vittlar has always liked to mess things up for me. Just because I am thirty, he wants me to leave my bed and gather disciples. Then my lawyer came, brandishing a paper and trumpeting congratulations. Hanging his nylon hat on my bedpost, he proclaimed to me and all my birthday guests: "What a happy coincidence! Today my client is celebrating his thirtieth birthday; and just today I've received news that the Ring Finger Case is being reopened. A new clue has been found. Sister Beata, her friend, you remember . . ."

Just what I have been dreading for years, ever since my getaway: that they would find the real murderer, reopen the case, acquit me, discharge me from this mental hospital, take away my lovely bed, put me out in the cold street, in the

wind and rain, and oblige a thirty-year-old Oskar to gather disciples round himself and his drum.

So apparently it was Sister Beata who murdered my Sister Dorothea out of festering green jealousy.

Perhaps you remember? There was this Dr. Werner who—the situation is only too common in life as it is in the movies—stood between the two nurses. A nasty business: Beata was in love with Dr. Werner. Dr. Werner was in love with Dorothea. And Dorothea wasn't in love with anyone, unless it was secretly, deep down, with little Oskar. Werner fell sick. Dorothea took care of him, because he was put into her section. Sister Beata couldn't bear it. She inveigled Dorothea into taking a walk with her and killed or, if you prefer, did away with her in a rye field near Gerresheim. Now Beata was free to take care of Dr. Werner. But it seems that she took care of him in a special way, so much so that he did not get well; just the opposite. Perhaps the love-crazed nurse said to herself: As long as he is sick, he belongs to me. Did she give him too much medicine? Did she give him the wrong medicine? In any case, Dr. Werner died; but when she testified in court, Sister Beata said nothing about wrong or too much, and not one word about her stroll in the rye fields with Sister Dorothea. And Oskar, who similarly confessed to nothing, but was the owner of an incriminating finger in a preserving jar, was convicted of the crime in the rye field. But esteeming that Oskar was not fully responsible for his actions, they sent me to the mental hospital for observation. Be that as it may, before they convicted him and sent him to the mental hospital, Oskar fled, for I wished, by my disappearance, to heighten the value of my friend Gottfried's denunciation.

At the time of my flight, I was twenty-eight. A few hours ago thirty candles were still dripping phlegmatically over my birthday cake. On the day of my flight it was September, just as it is today. I was born in the sign of Virgo. At the moment, though, it's my getaway I'm talking about, not my birth beneath the light bulbs.

As I have said, the eastward escape route, the road to my grandmother, was closed. Accordingly, like everyone else nowadays, I saw myself obliged to flee westward. If, Oskar, I said to myself, the inscrutable ways of politics prevent you from going to your grandmother, why not run to your grandfather, who is living in Buffalo, U.S.A.? Take America as your destination; we'll see how far you get.

before Aachen I was fully conscious of it. Monotonous words. They took possession of me as I sank back in the first-class upholstery. After Aachen—we crossed the border at half-past ten—they were still with me, more and more distinct and terrible, and I was glad when the customs inspectors changed the subject. They showed more interest in my hump than in my name or passport, and I said to myself: Oh, that Vittlar! That lazybones. Here it is almost eleven, and still he hasn't got to the police with that preserving jar under his arm, whereas I, for his sake, have been busy with this getaway since the crack of dawn, working myself up into a state of terror just to create a motive for my flight. Belgium. Oh, what a fright I was in when the rails sang: Where's the Witch, black as pitch? Here's the black, wicked Witch. Ha, ha, ha . . .

Today I am thirty, I shall be given a new trial and presumably be acquitted. I shall be thrown out in the street, and everywhere, in trains and streetcars, those words will ring in my ears: Where's the Witch, black as pitch? Here's the black, wicked Witch.

Still, apart from my dread of the Black Witch whom I expected to turn up at every station, the trip was pleasant enough. I had the whole compartment to myself—but maybe she was in the next one, right behind the partition—I made the acquaintance first of Belgian, then of French customs inspectors, dozed off from time to time, and woke up with a little cry. In an effort to ward off the Witch, I leafed through *Der Spiegel*, which I had bought on the platform in Düsseldorf; how they get around, how well informed they are, I kept saying to myself. I even found a piece about my manager, Dr. Dösch of the West Concert Bureau, confirming what I already knew, namely, that Oskar the Drummer was the mainstay and meal ticket of the Dösch agency—good picture of me too. And Oskar the Mainstay pictured to himself the inevitable collapse of the West Concert Bureau after my arrest.

Never in all my life had I feared the Black Witch. It was not until my flight, when I wanted to be afraid, that she crawled under my skin. And there she has remained to this day, my thirtieth birthday, though most of the time she sleeps. She takes a number of forms. Sometimes, for instance, it is the name "Goethe" that sets me screaming and hiding under the bedclothes. From childhood on I have done my best to study the poet prince and still his Olympian

calm gives me the creeps. Even now, when, no longer luminous and classical but disguised as a black witch more sinister by far than any Rasputin, he peers through the bars of my bed and asks me, on the occasion of my thirtieth birthday: "Where's the Witch, black as pitch?"—I am scared stiff.

Ha, ha, ha! said the train carrying Oskar the fugitive to Paris. I was already expecting to see the International Police when we pulled in to the North Station, the Gare du Nord as the French call it. But there was no one waiting for me, only a porter, who smelled so reassuringly of red wine that with the best of intentions I couldn't mistake him for the Black Witch. I gave him my suitcase and let him carry it to within a few feet of the gate. The police and the Witch, I said to myself, probably don't feel like wasting money on a platform ticket, they will accost you and arrest you on the other side of the gate. So you'd better take back your suitcase before you go through. But the police weren't there to relieve me of my suitcase; I had to haul it to the Metro my very own self.

I won't go on about that famous Metro smell. I have recently read somewhere that it has been done into a perfume and that you can spray yourself with it. The Metro also asked about the whereabouts of the Black Witch, though in a rhythm rather different from that of the railroad. And another thing I noticed: the other passengers must have feared her as much as I did, for they were all asweat with terror. My idea was to continue underground to the Porte d'Italie, where I would take a cab to Orly Airport. If I couldn't be arrested at the North Station, it seemed to me that Orly, the world-famous airport—with the Witch done up as an airline hostess—would do very nicely, that it was an interesting place to be arrested in. There was one change of trains, I was glad my suitcase was so light. The Metro carried me southward and I pondered: where, Oskar, are you going to get off? Goodness me, how many things can happen in one day, this morning a cow licked you not far from Gerresheim, you were fearless and gay, and now you are in Paris—where will you get off, where will she come, black and terrible, to meet you? At the Place d'Italie? Or not until the Porte?

I got off at Maison Blanche, the last station before the Porte, thinking: they must think I think they are waiting at the Porte. But She knows what I think and what they think.

seemed to be raining outside. The people looked wet. That had me worried; I hadn't had time to buy a raincoat before leaving Düsseldorf. However, I took another look upward, and Oskar saw that the gentlemen with the faces had civilian umbrellas—but that cast no doubt on the existence of the Black Witch.

How shall I address them? I wondered, slowly savoring my cigarette as slowly the escalator aroused lofty feelings in me and enriched my knowledge: one is rejuvenated on an escalator, on an escalator one grows older and older. I had the choice of leaving that escalator as a three-year-old or as a man of sixty, of meeting the Interpol, not to mention the Black Witch, as an infant or as an old man.

It must be getting late. My iron bedstead looks so tired. And Bruno my keeper has twice showed an alarmed brown eye at the peephole. There beneath the water color of the anemones stands my uncut cake with its thirty candles. Perhaps Maria is already asleep. Someone, Maria's sister Guste, I think, wished me luck for the next thirty years. I envy Maria her sound sleep. What did Kurt, the schoolboy, the model pupil, always first in his class, what did my son Kurt wish me for my birthday? When Maria sleeps, the furniture round about her sleeps too. I have it: Kurt wished me a speedy recovery for my thirtieth birthday. But what I wish myself is a slice of Maria's sound sleep, for I am tired and words fail me. Klepp's young wife made up a silly but well-meant birthday poem addressed to my hump. Prince Eugene was also deformed, but that didn't prevent him from capturing the city and fortress of Belgrade. Prince Eugene also had two fathers. Now I am thirty, but my hump is younger. Louis XIV was Prince Eugene's presumptive father. In years past, beautiful women would touch my hump in the street, they thought it would bring them luck. Prince Eugene was deformed and that's why he died a natural death. If Jesus had had a hump, they would never have nailed him to the Cross. Must I really, just because I am thirty years of age, go out into the world and gather disciples round me?

But that's the kind of idea you get on an escalator. Higher and higher it bore me. Ahead of me and above me the brazen lovers. Behind and below me the woman with the hat. Outside it was raining, and up on top stood the detectives from the Interpol. The escalator steps had slats on them. An escalator ride is a good time to reconsider, to reconsider everything: Where are you from? Where are you going? Who

are you? What is your real name? What are you after? Smells assailed me: Maria's youthful vanilla. The sardine oil that my mother warmed up in the can and drank hot until she grew cold and was laid under the earth. In spite of Jan Bronski's lavish use of cologne, the smell of early death had seeped through all his buttonholes. The storage cellar of Greff's vegetable store had smelled of winter potatoes. And once again the smell of the dry sponges that dangled from the slates of the first-graders. And my Roswitha who smelled of cinnamon and nutmeg. I had floated on a cloud of carbolic acid when Mr. Fajngold sprinkled disinfectant on my fever. Ah, and the Catholic smells of the Church of the Sacred Heart, all those vestments that were never aired, the cold dust, and I, at the left side-altar, lending my drum, to whom?

But that's the kind of idea you get on an escalator. Today they want to pin me down, to nail me to the Cross. They say: you are thirty. So you must gather disciples. Remember what you said when they arrested you. Count the candles on your birthday cake, get out of that bed and gather disciples. Yet so many possibilities are open to a man of thirty. I might, for example, should they really throw me out of the hospital, propose to Maria a second time. My chances would be much better today. Oskar has set her up in business, he is famous, he is still making good money with his records, and he has grown older, more mature. At thirty a man should marry. Or I could stay single and marry one of my professions, buy a good shell-lime quarry, hire stonecutters, and deliver directly to the builders. At thirty a man should start

career. Or—in case my business is ruined by prefabricated slabs—I could revive my partnership with the Muse Ulla, side by side we would dispense inspiration to artists. Some day I might even make an honest woman of the Muse, poor thing, with all those blitz engagements. At thirty a man should marry. Or should I grow weary of Europe, I could emigrate: America, Buffalo, my old dream: Off I go, in search of my grandfather, Joe Colchic, formerly Joseph Koljaiczek, the millionaire and sometime firebug. At thirty a man should settle down. Or I could give in and let them nail me to the Cross. Just because I happen to be thirty, I go out and play the Messiah they see in me; against my better judgment I make my drum stand for more than it can, I make a symbol out of it, found a sect, a party, or maybe only a lodge.

This escalator thought came over me in spite of the lovers

above me and the woman with hat below me. Have I said that the lovers were two steps, not one, above me, that I put down my suitcase between myself and the lovers? The young people in France are very strange. As the escalator carried us all upward, she unbuttoned his leather jacket, then his shirt, and fondled his bare, eighteen-year-old skin. But so businesslike, so completely unerotic were her movements that a suspicion arose in me: these youngsters are being paid by the government to keep up the reputation of Paris, city of unabashed love. But when they kissed, my suspicion vanished, for he nearly choked on her tongue and was still in the midst of a coughing fit when I snuffed out my cigarette, preferring to meet the detectives as a nonsmoker. The old woman below me and her hat—what I am trying to say is that her hat was on a level with my head because the two steps made up for my small stature—did nothing to attract attention, all she did was to mutter and protest a bit all by herself, but lots of old people do that in Paris. The rubber-covered bannister moved up along with us. You could put your hand on it and give your hand a free ride. I should have done so if I had brought gloves along. Each tile on the wall reflected a little drop of electric light. Cream-colored pipes and cables kept us company as we mounted. It should not be thought that this escalator made a fiendish din. Despite its mechanical character, it was a gentle, easygoing contrivance. In spite of the witch jingle, the Maison Blanche Metro station struck me as a pleasant place to be in, almost homelike. I felt quite at home on that escalator; despite my terror, despite the Witch, I should have esteemed myself happy if only the people round me on the escalator had not been total strangers but my friends and relatives, living and dead: my poor mama between Matzerath and Jan Bronski; Mother Truczinski, the grey-haired mouse, with her children Herbert, Guste, Fritz, Maria; Greff the greengrocer and his slovenly Lina; and of course Bebra the master and Roswitha so lithe, and graceful—all those who had framed my questionable existence, those who had come to grief on the shoal of my existence. But at the top, where the escalator ended, I should have liked, in place of the Interpol men, to see the exact opposite of the Black Witch: my grandmother Anna Koljaiczek standing there like a mountain, ready to receive me and my retinue, our journey ended, under her skirts, into the heart of the mountain.

Instead there were two gentlemen, wearing not wide skirts,

but American-style raincoats. And toward the end of my journey, I had to smile with all ten of my toes and admit to myself that the brazen lovers above me and the muttering woman below me were plain ordinary detectives.

What more shall I say: born under light bulbs, deliberately stopped growing at age of three, given drum, sang glass to pieces, smelled vanilla, coughed in churches, observed ants, decided to grow, buried drum, emigrated to the West, lost the East, learned stonecutter's trade, worked as model, started drumming again, visited concrete, made money, kept finger, gave finger away, fled laughing, rode up escalator, arrested, convicted, sent to mental hospital, soon to be acquitted, celebrating this day my thirtieth birthday and still afraid of the Black Witch.

I threw away my cigarette. It fell in one of the grooves in the escalator step. After riding upward for some distance at an angle of forty-five degrees, he traveled three more steps on the horizontal; then he let the brazen detective lovers and the detective grandmother push him off the escalator onto a stationary platform. When the gentlemen from the Interpol had introduced themselves and called him Matzerath, he replied, in obedience to his escalator idea, first in German: "Ich bin Jesus," then, aware that these were international agents, in French, and finally in English: "I am Jesus."

Nevertheless, I was arrested under the name of Oskar Matzerath. Offering no resistance, I put myself under the protection and, since it was raining on the Avenue d'Italie, the umbrellas, of the Interpol men. But I was still afraid. Several times I looked anxiously around and several times, here and there—yes, that is one of her talents—I saw the terribly placid countenance of the Black Witch among the passers-by on the avenue and then in the crowd that gathered round the paddy wagon.

I am running out of words, and still I cannot help wondering what Oskar is going to do after his inevitable discharge from the mental hospital. Marry? Stay single? Emigrate? Model? Buy a stone quarry? Gather disciples? Found a sect?

All the possibilities that are open nowadays to a man of thirty must be examined, but how examine them if not with my drum? And so I will drum out the little ditty which has become more and more real to me, more and more terrifying; I shall call in the Black Witch and consult her, and then

tomorrow morning I shall be able to tell Bruno my keeper what mode of existence the thirty-year-old Oskar is planning to carry on in the shadow of a buggaboo which, though getting blacker and blacker, is the same old friend that used to frighten me on the cellar stairs, that said boo in the coal cellar, so I couldn't help laughing, but it was there just the same, talking with fingers, coughing through the keyhole, moaning in the stove, squeaking in tune with the door, smoking up from chimneys when the ships were blowing their foghorns, when a fly buzzed for hours as it died between the double windows, or when eels clamored for Mama and my poor mama for eels, and when the sun sank behind Tower Mountain but lived on as pure sunlit amber. Who was Herbert after when he assaulted the wooden statue? And behind the high altar—what would Catholicism be without the Witch who blackens every confessional with her shadow? It was her shadow that fell when Sigismund Markus' toys were smashed to bits. The brats in the court of our building, Axel Mischke and Nuchi Eyke, Susi Kater and Hänschen Kollin, they knew: For what did they sing as they cooked their brick-meal soup: "Where's the Witch, black as pitch? Here's the black, wicked Witch. Ha, ha, ha! You're to blame. And you are too, You're most to blame, You! you! you! Where's the Witch, black as pitch? . . ." She had always been there, even in the woodruff fizz powder, bubbling so green and innocent; she was in clothes cupboards, in every clothes cupboard I ever sat in; later on, she borrowed Lucy Rennwand's triangular fox face, ate sausage sandwiches skins and all and sent the Dusters up on the diving tower: Oskar alone remained, he watched the ants, and he knew: it's *her* shadow that has multiplied and is following the sweetness. All words: blessed, sorrowful, full of grace, virgin of virgins . . . and all stones: basalt, tufa, diorite, nests in the shell lime, alabaster so soft . . . and all the shattered glass, glass transparent, glass blown to hair-thinness . . . and all the groceries, all the flour and sugar in blue pound and half-pound bags. Later on four tomcats, one of whom was called Bismarck, the wall that had to be freshly whitewashed, the Poles in the exaltation of death, the special communiqués, who sank what when, potatoes tumbling down from the scales, boxes tapered at the foot end, cemeteries I stood in, flags I knelt on, coconut fibers I lay on . . . the puppies mixed in the concrete, the onion juice that draws tears, the ring on the finger and the cow that licked me . . . Don't

ask Oskar who she is! Words fail me. First she was behind me, later she kissed my hump, but now, now and forever, she is in front of me, coming closer.

Always somewhere behind me, the Black Witch.
Now ahead of me, too, facing me, Black.
Black words, black coat, black money.
But if children sing, they sing no longer:
Where's the Witch, black as pitch?
Here's the black, wicked Witch.
Ha! ha! ha!

Glossary

Bollermann and Wulltski: popular characters, symbolizing German and Polish elements, frequent in Danzig jokes or stories.

Burckhardt, Carl Jacob: Swiss diplomat and historian who served as League of Nations High Commissioner of Danzig, 1937-1939.

Cold Storage Medal: the colloquial name given to the medal for service in the German army on the Arctic front.

Currency Reform: the West German monetary policy established in 1948. The introduction of the Deutsche mark to replace the inflated reichsmark had a highly beneficial psychological effect on German businessmen and is considered the turning point in the postwar reconstruction and economic development of West Germany.

Draussen vor der Tür: a drama by Wolfgang Borchert describing the hopeless situation of the returning prisoner of war after World War II.

Edelweiss Pirates of Cologne: the most notorious of the armed bands of youths which appeared in Germany toward the end of World War II.

Forster, Albert: Gauleiter, or Nazi district leader, of Danzig from 1930. On September 1, 1939, Forster declared the Free City Treaty provisions null and void, suspended the constitution, and proclaimed the annexation of Danzig to the German Reich with himself as sole administrator.

Frings, Joseph Cardinal: Cardinal of Cologne, today the official leader of all German Catholics.

Winter Aid (Winterhilfe): the major Nazi charity, set up under the slogan "War on Hunger and Cold," to which the German people made compulsory contributions.

ZOB: Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, or Jewish Combat Organization, an underground movement formed in the ghetto in 1942-1943.

